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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE



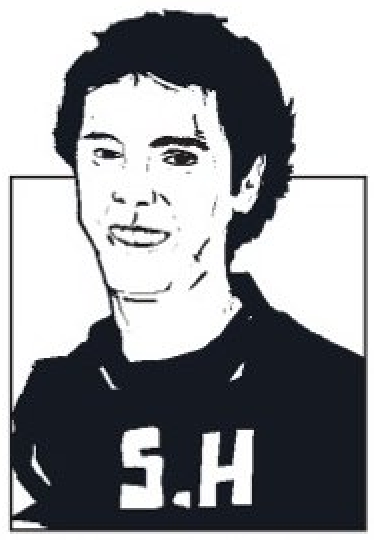
DARRAN JONES

Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis for me, due to it having everything you want from a great *Indy* adventure. Why it wasn't turned into a film I'll never know.

Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**

Currently playing:
Star Fox 64 3D

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

For me it has to be *Maniac Mansion*. Great humour, memorable characters, a lovely art style and wonderfully inventive puzzles; the whole kit and caboodle.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
EDF: Insect Armageddon

Favourite game of all time:
EDF: Insect Armageddon



PAUL DAVIES

It's going to have to be the first *Monkey Island*, unless *Maniac Mansion* counts? [Of course it counts – Ed]

Expertise:
Repeatedly banging my head against a brick wall

Currently playing:
Halo: Reach

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



IAIN LEE

I always found them quite tedious and never got into them. Sorry, have I just said a dirty word?

Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live

Currently playing:
Halo: Reach

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBC version)



ANDREW FISHER

I'm going to choose LucasArt's excellent *Zak McKracken* (C64), for all its wacky humour.

Expertise:
25 years of classic gaming

Currently playing:
Lots of games created with the *Shoot'Em-Up Construction Kit*

Favourite game of all time:
The Sentinel (C64)



PAUL DRURY

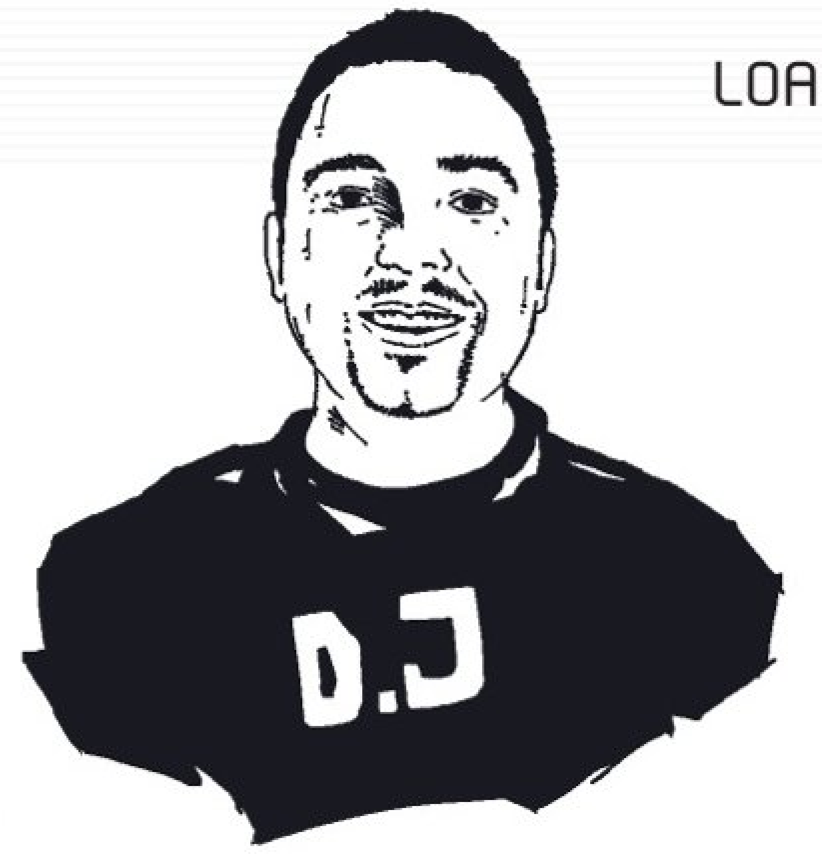
I was a text adventure stalwart and thus was rather snobby about the point-and-click new boys until the excellent *Broken Sword* series seduced me.

Expertise:
Analogue joysticks

Currently playing:
Frogger (Coleco handheld)

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space

LOADING...



I've said it before and I'll no doubt say it again, but there's a lot for us to still report in Retro Gamer. Yes, we've paid lip service to *Maniac Mansion* in the past, but never on this scale. We've a brilliant cover courtesy of freelancer Mat Allen, and Stuart's put together a cracking article thanks to fascinating anecdotes from Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick.

As **Retro Gamer**'s readership continues to increase and new forum members pop up, it's becoming more obvious that tastes are varying by a huge degree. We've had the 'What is retro?' debate a hundred times already, but as more people read the mag and send in letters like 'When can we have more PS2 coverage?' it's obvious that the debate is going to continue. That's one of the reasons why articles like Future Classic exist. Reader's tastes are changing all the time and we'd be doing you all a real disservice if we didn't keep up. But we're not going to be changing content any time soon. We've always been prominently focused on the 8 and 16-bit machines and that's where the focus will stay. After all, we've only just fully covered *Maniac Mansion*; just think of all the other classics worthy of your attention.

Enjoy the magazine,

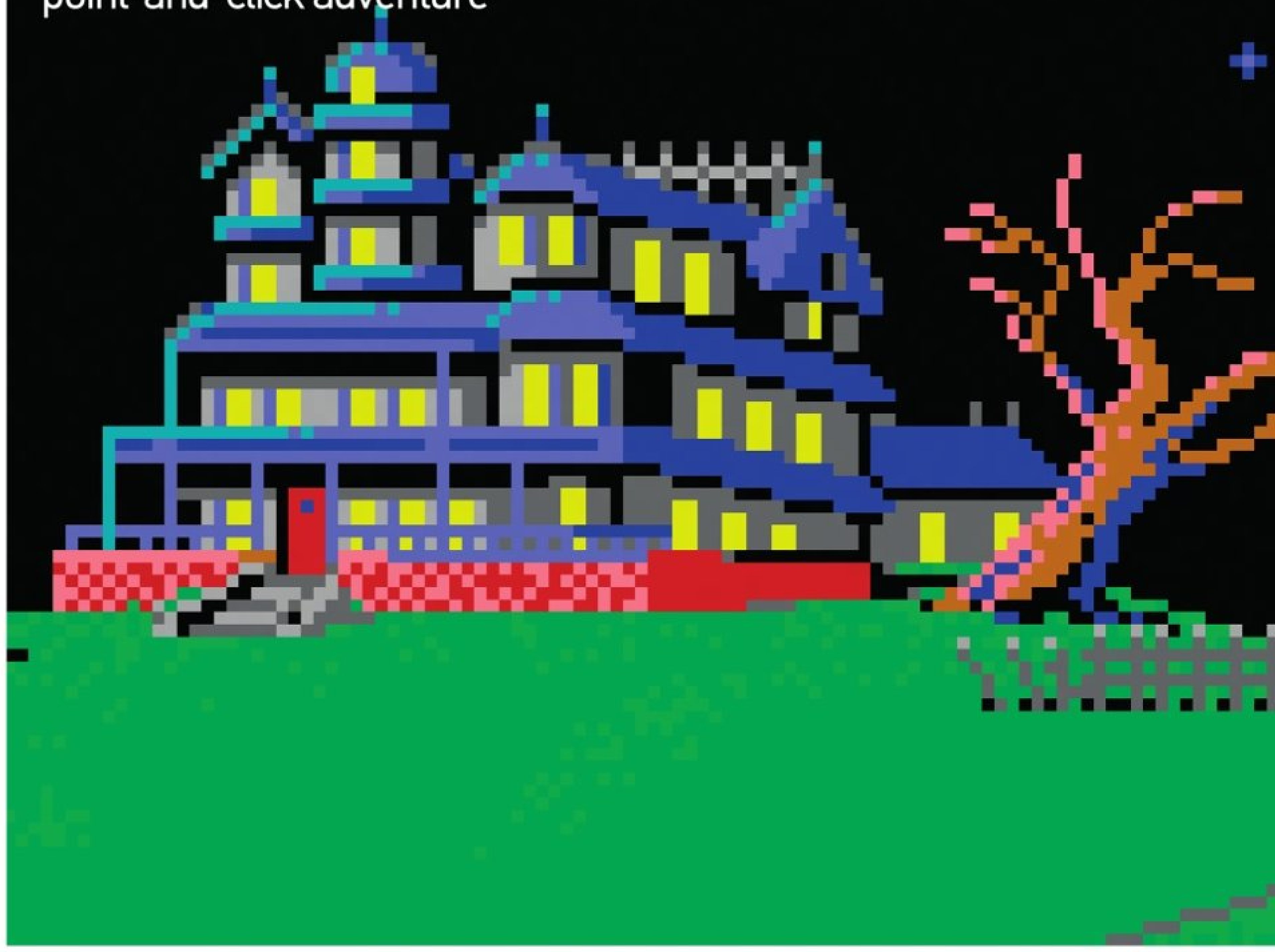


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>> Load 94 Breathing new life into classic games

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"Crazy, hilarious and devoted to the franchise" Samuel Roberts



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Samuel Roberts explains why Mario's first Game Boy Advance RPG is one of his best and funniest adventures

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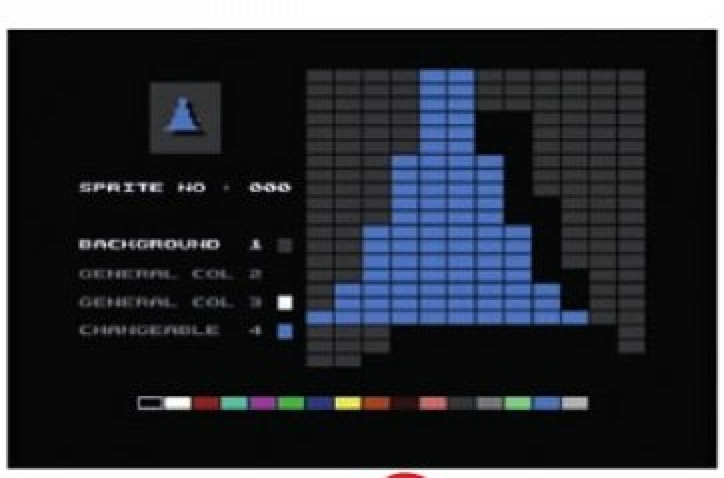
How Jack Tramiel kick-started Nolan Bushnell's old empire





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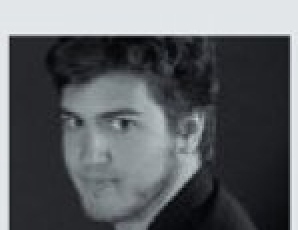
We celebrate the GBA's tenth birthday by revealing its best original games



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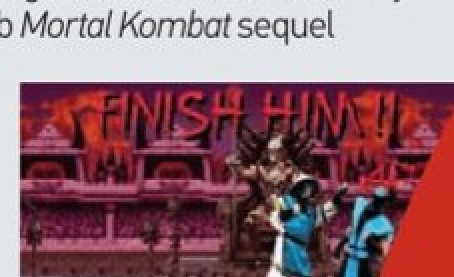
retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL



22 MORTAL KOMBAT II

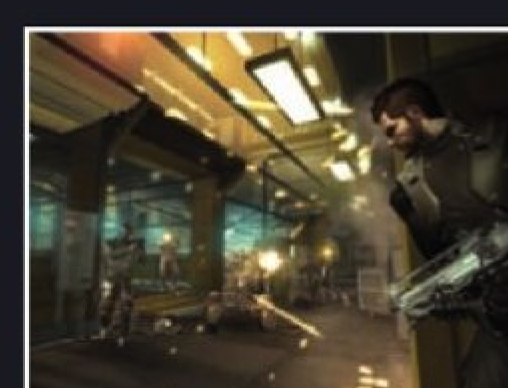
Reader Michael Levy explains how Acclaim got everything right – including the blood – for its brutally superb *Mortal Kombat* sequel





ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It has been something of a quiet month this issue. Mindscape finally bowed out of the software market after 28 years, Nintendo tries to kick-start interest in the 3DS with a new incentive, and Nick Humphries has started a new monthly news update for the Spectrum

* CONTENTS



MINDSCAPE BIDS THE GAMES INDUSTRY AU REVOIR

THE FRENCH PUBLISHER CLOSES ITS LAST INTERNAL GAME STUDIO

Long-standing games publisher Mindscape has announced this month that it will be exiting the games industry after 28 years, following the closure of its last internal game studio, Punchers Impact. According to reports, the closure will result in the loss of around 40 jobs.

Paris-based Punchers Impact was formed in 2009, and was specifically established by Mindscape to develop digital product for the Xbox 360, PS3 and PC platforms.

In the same year that the studio was established, Mindscape released the casual Wii music title *U-Sing*. Developed in partnership with music publisher Universal Music, it was the first karaoke title ever released for the console and was a commercial success, selling well at retail.

Things continued to look promising for Mindscape when in February 2010 Punchers Impact announced its first title, the digital PC battle racer *Crasher*. Released in early 2011, it marked the first internally developed downloadable title released by Mindscape.

The company bet big on *Crasher*, but unfortunately the debut title failed to meet expectations, and the middling reviews and lacklustre impact appear to be at the centre of Mindscape's decision to close Punchers Impact and exit the games industry.

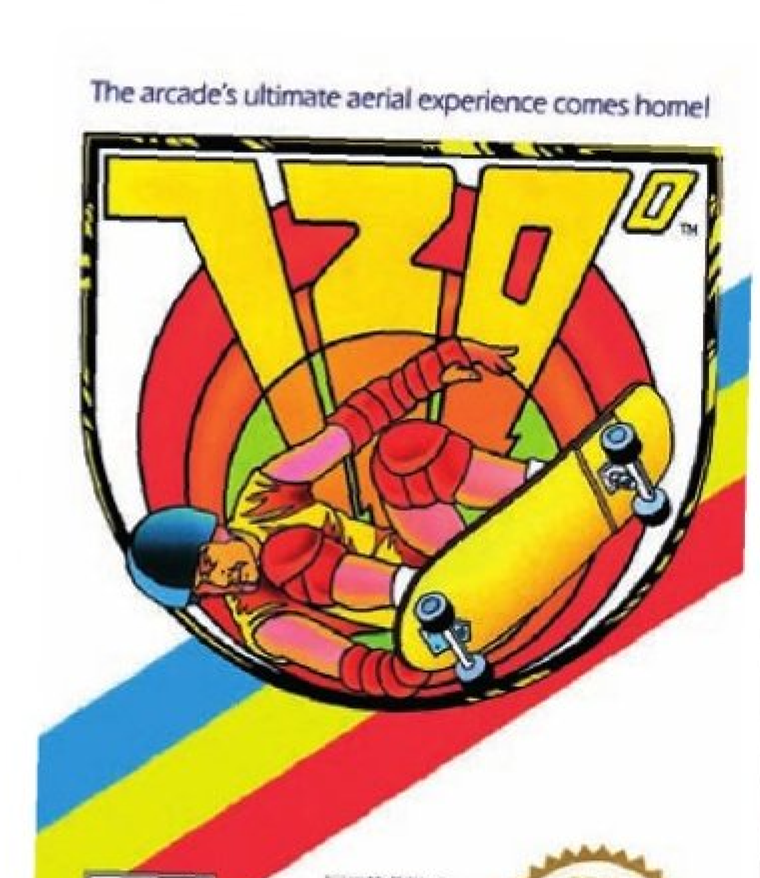
A company spokesperson told Develop recently: "We had relied much on that game. It was not a success and was important to us that it was." The person then added: "We are no longer going to work in the game software business."

Though most people above a certain age should be familiar with Mindscape, what many may not be aware of is that the company has a turbulent and complex history of various mergers and buyouts since its inception.

Formed in 1983 by Scholastic executive Roger Buoy, Mindscape became successful in the Eighties based on publishing educational software and a slew of popular computer games. Its most well-known releases included the first ever point-and-click adventure game in *Déjà Vu: A Nightmare Comes True*, *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O'Fun*, and the seminal Cold



> **"Mindscape is now developing a line of rabbit-themed house robots called Karotz"**



» Mindscape published a number of arcade conversions for the NES, including the Atari titles *Gauntlet* and *720°*.





» [PC] Sadly, Punchers Impact's debut title *Crasher* failed to capture the imaginations of PC gamers.

War strategy game *Balance Of Power*, to name but a few.

In 1990, though, the company merged with Californian computer game publisher The Software Toolworks, creator of the hugely successful *Chessmaster* series. After the deal was struck, Mindscape gradually began moving its focus away from computer software to concentrate on publishing titles for consoles instead, most notably for the NES.

After Roger Buoy left the organisation in 1992, a second buyout occurred in 1994, this time by UK media group Pearson. While under this new ownership, Mindscape acquired the companies Strategic Simulations, Inc (SSI) and MicroLogic Software.

In the space of four years, four more buyouts happened, beginning with The Learning Company in 1998. TLC was then sold, along with Mindscape, to toy company Mattel the following year. In 2000 both The Learning Company and Mindscape were acquired by the Gores Technology Group.

In 2001, however, Mindscape became an independent entity once more when it, along with all of its divisions and subsidiaries, was sold to Jean-Pierre Nordman, a former MD of The Learning Company's international division.

With headquarters based in France, Mindscape acquired French developer Coktel Vision in 2005 and then in 2009 formed Punchers Impact, a brand new studio led by game designer Guillaume Descamps and made up of former Electronic Arts and Free Radical staffers.

The closure of Punchers Impact will end nearly three decades of Mindscape's presence in the games industry. Having made the decision to move away from game publishing, the company is now looking at expanding into other technological industries.



Mindscape is currently developing a line of rabbit-themed house robots called Karotz, which we suspect could be a sign of the kind of things to come from the refocused company. *

THE RETRO DEBATE

>> Thoughts on Mindscape

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Jagfest_UK
Great shame to see anyone go, but Mindscape seems to have been around forever, which makes it even worse. I particularly enjoyed *Loopz* by them, which is a really underrated puzzle game.

Greyfox
Wow. This is sad news. Enjoyed *Battletoads* they did on the Amiga, wasn't a big fan of their turn-based games, but will be remembered for *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O'Fun* and *Moonstone: A Hard Days Knight* nonetheless. They don't make games like this nowadays, not even in the homebrew community.

snowkatt
I can't really recall any Mindscape title I played, but it's always bad news when a developer closes, especially one as old as Mindscape.

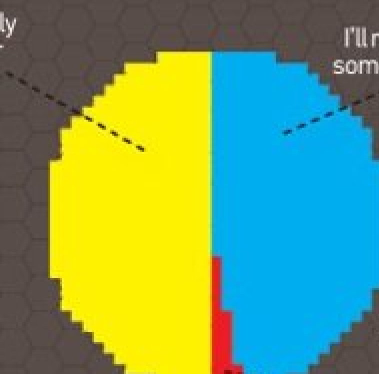
FatTrucker
In terms of the gaming landscape it will make bugger all difference nowadays, but still a great shame to see such a long-running development house close its doors. *Captive* was one of my favourite games on the ST. I hope their staff all manage to secure other work and stay in the industry.

AmigaJay
A great shame to hear. Even though they haven't released anything memorable for the last 15 years it's the early Nineties Amiga/CD32 games I'll remember them for – *Moonstone, D/Generation, Liberation: Captive 2*, among others

paranoid marvin
It's sad to see one of the long-running games companies closing its doors. They were involved with many titles, but the fantastically bloody *Moonstone* is probably their greatest contribution to gaming.

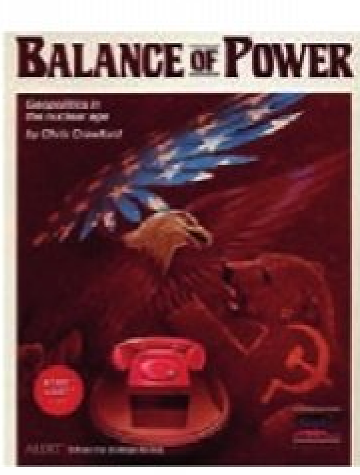
joefish
To be honest, I thought they'd gone years ago. Always a shame if people are going to lose jobs, but from their recent history it looks like they've ping-ponged between parent companies and achieved very little since the mid-Nineties. I wonder if there's much of the original company left except the name anyway.

FORUM OPINION
Thoughts on Mindscape



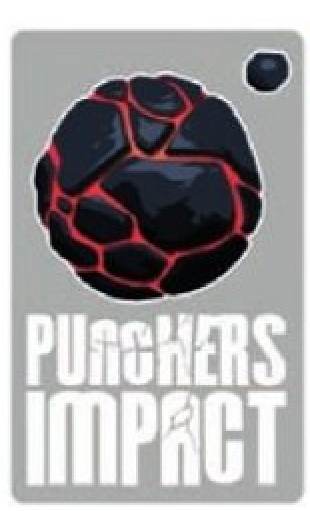
Mindscape's Evolution

>> The highs, the lows and the future



Promising start

After being founded in 1983 by Scholastic exec Roger Buoy, Mindscape saw success during the Eighties by publishing a number of popular games for home computers. One of the biggest titles it released was the seminal Macintosh adventure game *Déjà Vu: A Nightmare Comes True*, the popular circus-themed mini-game title *Fiendish Freddy's Big Top O'Fun*, and the computer strategy game *Balance Of Power*. Following its merger with The Software Toolworks in 1990, Mindscape then turned its attentions to the burgeoning console market.



Failure to impact

After numerous buyouts and ownership changes, in 2001 Mindscape, along with all its divisions, was bought by Jean-Pierre Nordman. In 2009 Mindscape formed a new internal development studio, Punchers Impact. The studio's first title was the downloadable PC combat racer *Crasher*. Released earlier this year, the online-only battle arena game failed to capture the attention of consumers. Punchers Impact is consequently being closed, and a spokesperson for Mindscape announced to Develop that the company will be exiting the games industry.



The future?

Looking at the sort of products that Mindscape might produce away from gaming, the company website provides a possible clue. Mindscape is currently developing a series of rabbit-themed house robots called Karotz. By giving them verbal instructions, these multitasking rab-bots will wake you in the morning, let you know what the weather is doing, provide you with traffic reports, and will even read your friends' status updates from Facebook. Perhaps this is a sign of things to come from the company as it looks to diversify into new electronics markets.

Here's the bio…
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro

Awards Ceremonies

I recently had the honour of hosting two industry awards ceremonies, the MCV and the Develop Awards. Both were swish affairs with all the great and the good of the videogames industry attending, with the hope of bagging one of these special prizes.

I do get asked to present at all different kinds of ceremonies, but for me, it's a real pleasure to host an evening when it's something I know about. I remember once being at some strange do, wearing a black tie (and a suit of course) and announcing that the next winner had achieved the highest yield in zinc this quarter, and how that affected the mining industry as a whole. I didn't have the foggiest what I was going on about. Still, the money I earned bought me my second Porsche. Or maybe it was my first Jaguar? One of the two.

The highlight at Develop was meeting BAFTA winner and all-round legend Ian Livingstone. It was kind of like shaking hands with a Beatle. Even if he had achieved nothing more, those *Fighting Fantasy* books were just awesome.

The problem at these events is what to say? You try getting up in front of 1,000 pissed up videogame and advertising execs and make them laugh. A lot of them are baying for blood. To help me, I turned to the lazy writers plan B: Twitter. I asked my followers (I'm @iainlee, if you're interested) to send me any videogame jokes they had. A lot of them were utter rubbish, as you'd expect, but there were a few gems. I include the best ones here for your pleasure.

Mario Condoms: they come in Peach!

You know you've played too much Call Of Duty when you think the postman is trying to plant a C4 on your doorstep.

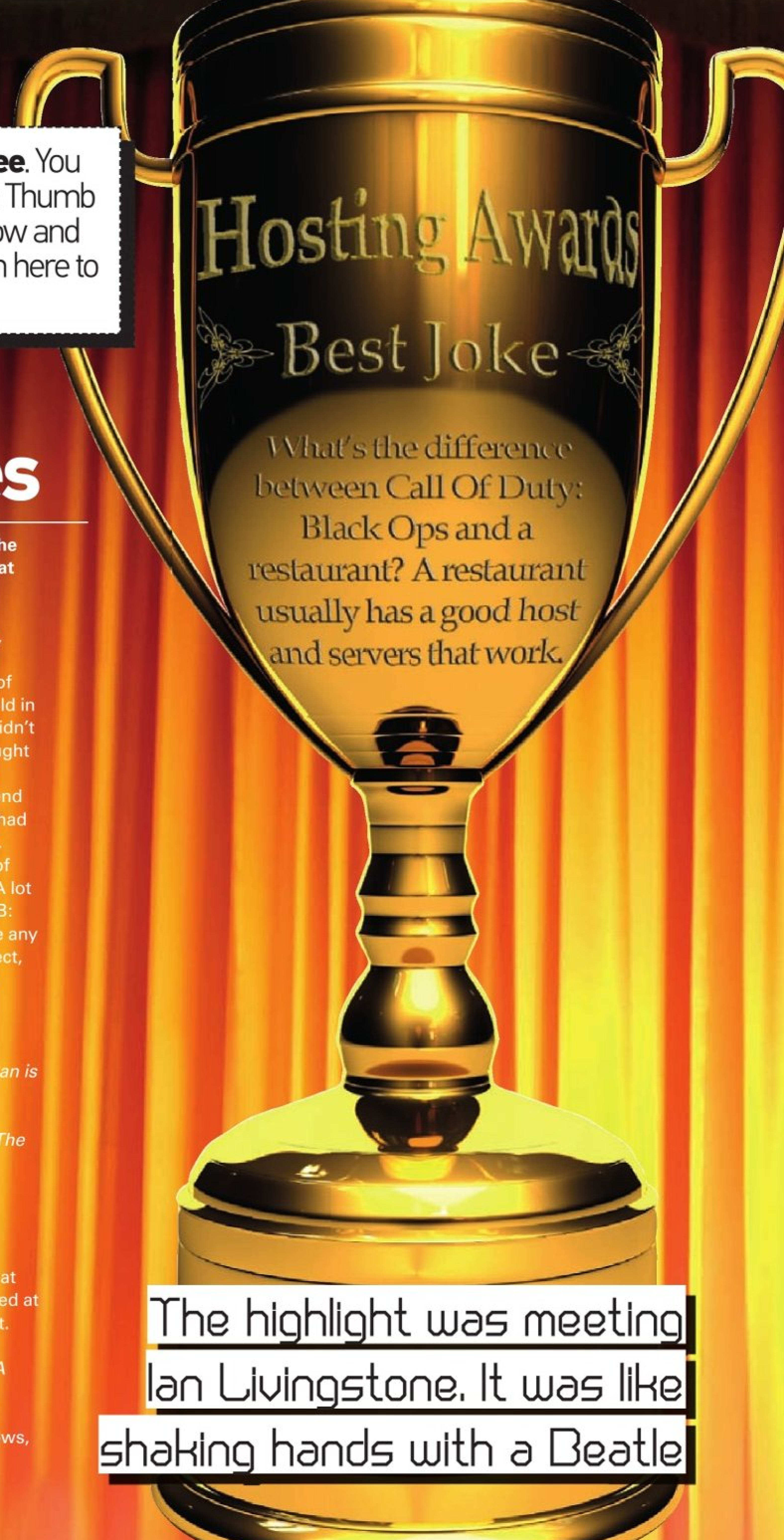
Did you hear about the new, pornographic game featuring Master Chief? The working title is Halo: Reach-Around.

You know you've been playing Halo too much when the weatherman announces flood risks and you get out a shotgun.

The next joke is my favourite. It got a huge laugh and a round of applause at one of the evenings, and was met with the sucking of teeth and tumbleweed at the next. I think the high number of Activision staff may have had an effect.

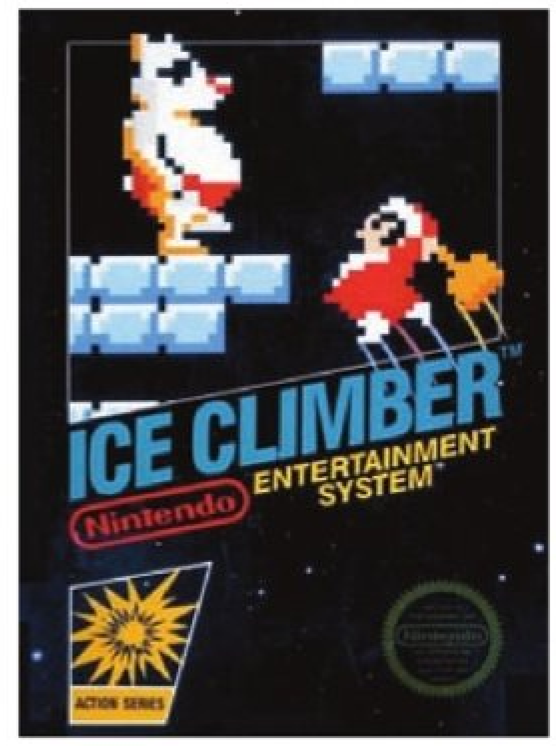
What's the difference between Call Of Duty: Black Ops and a restaurant? A restaurant usually has a good host and servers that work.

If you've got any more, do send them to me at iain@iainlee.com. Who knows, you may get the chance to upset Activision yourself one day!



The highlight was meeting Ian Livingstone. It was like shaking hands with a Beatle





» While some have complained about the free games, we think it's a worthy gesture and are looking forward to playing *Ice Climber* and *Balloon Fight* on the move.

NINTENDO REVEALS 3DS RESCUE PLAN

NINTENDO ANNOUNCES 3DS PRICE DROP AND FREE GAMES FOR EXISTING CUSTOMERS

It's clear that the Nintendo 3DS has failed to make the impact that Nintendo had hoped. A prohibitive price, short battery life, the popularity of mobile gaming, and a launch line-up that has so far either failed to impress (*Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D*) or been late to materialise (*Star Fox 64 3D*) have all contributed to the console having a bit of a rough time of it lately.

In response to those lacklustre sales, Nintendo made the surprise announcement that it would cut the price of the console by around 30 per cent in a bid to stimulate sales and interest. Nintendo president Satoru Iwata, who recently took a 50 per cent pay cut, later issued an apology to 3DS customers, explaining the reasons behind the decision.

But what of those early adopters who pledged support for the console before the price drop? Well, Nintendo quelled the risk of upsetting its loyal supporters by rolling out its Ambassador Programme, a scheme that will not be spoiling 3DS loyalists with their weight in Ferrero Rochers but instead a selection of 20 free Nintendo Virtual Console games.



Originally, registration via the Nintendo eShop was only open until 11 August, although Nintendo later extended the window, meaning that if you bought one at the original price and are able to dig out a receipt you could still register on the website to obtain the free titles.

The free games comprise ten NES games and ten Game Boy Advance ones. *Super Mario Bros*, *Donkey Kong Jr* and *Ice Climber* will be among the NES offering, while the GBA bundle will include *Mario vs Donkey Kong*, *Metroid Fusion* and *Yoshi's Island*, and possibly remain exclusive to Ambassadors. We say 'possibly' as Nintendo chose its words carefully in its press release, stating that it "currently has no plans to make these games available to the general public", so take from that what you will.

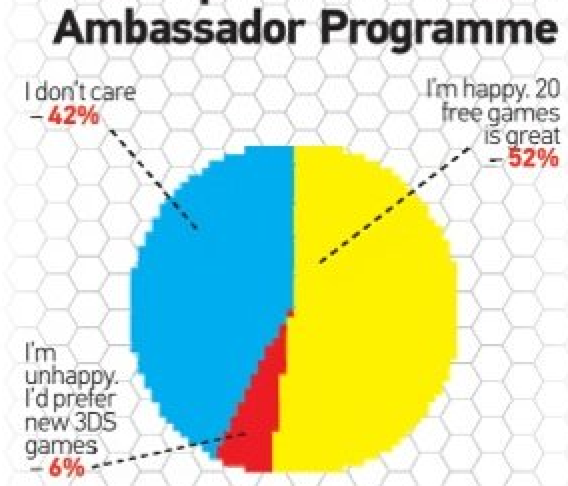
A price drop and free games is certainly an encouraging sign for both retailers and consumers that Nintendo is aware that there is an issue, and one that needs a fast resolution. Ultimately, though, it will be the software that decides the fate of the machine, and so far, bar a few notable titles – *Dead Or Alive Dimensions*, *Ocarina Of Time 3D* and *Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars* have impressed – things in that department have been a little underwhelming.

At the time of writing you can pick up a bare bones machine for £139.99 from Play.com, while high street retailer Game is offering a bundle pack with *Ocarina Of Time 3D* for the same price.

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Your opinion on the 3DS Ambassador Programme

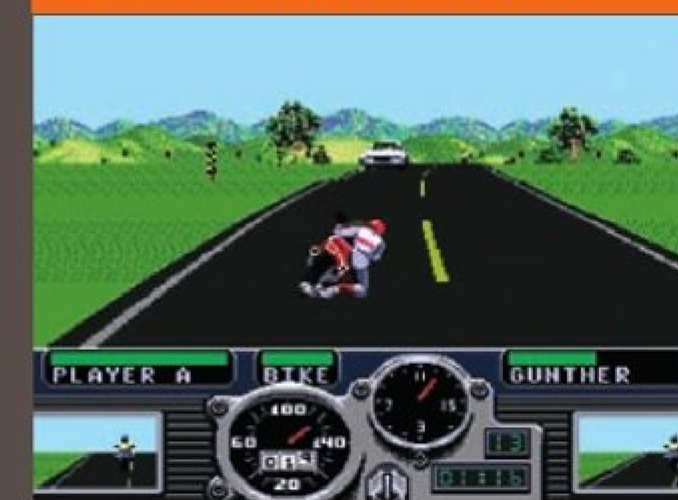


"I'm happy. The 3DS, like everything else, was bound to drop in price six months down the line anyway, so 20 free games is a bonus!" **– TheNewMonkey**

"First Sony give me three free games and now Nintendo want to give me 20. I hope this trend continues!" **– speedlolita**

MICROBYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



>> EA looking at reviving the past

In news sure to delight Mega Drive fans, EA Labels president Frank Gibeau told *CVG* that the company is looking at rebooting a handful of properties. Gibeau, who has worked on the *Road Rash* and *Strike* series, said that it rests strongly on coming up with a compelling reason to justify a revisit. The rumour that EA and Starbreeze are working to resurrect *Syndicate* has been floating for a while now, but we'd love to see a new *Road Rash*.



>> Disney to release new videogame-inspired movie

Following the disappointing *Tron Legacy*, Disney is busy creating another videogame-themed movie. Coming in November 2012, *Wreck-It Ralph* is a CG film that will see John C Reilly voicing an 8-bit videogame bad guy who becomes tired of being villainous and enters other games to become a good guy. Sounds bonkers, but you have to love the concept.



>> Worming back into our lives

HD remakes seem to be the must-have accessory this month. The next franchise in line to be getting an HD makeover is *Worms*. Team17 has announced that it will be releasing *Worms: Ultimate Mayhem* digitally on the 360, PS3 and PC platforms. The release is a double pack featuring polished versions of *Worms 3D* and *Worms 4: Mayhem*. As well as looking nicer, the updates will feature new multiplayer maps and voice acting.

retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...

In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.

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Hello, retro gamers. My name is **Paul Davies**. I used to be the editor of C&VG and have also worked on a number of classic gaming magazines over the years

If you've been reading games mags since 'back in the day' (mid-Eighties through Nineties) you'll know of this fabled location, you might have even come close to visiting as instructed.

It went something along the lines of: "I suggest visiting your local games emporium to purchase as soon as humanly possible." Or sometimes: "The man at my local games emporium says (Game X) is not coming out until next year! Tell me this isn't so!" Probably a UK thing, because it's a tradition still kept alive every now and then by websites and, I think, even **RG** today.

The games emporium! Coming from Rochdale we had no such thing, but two places in nearby Manchester came close. I imagined a games emporium to resemble the more touristy Turkish restaurants in North London; all satin cushions and hanging lanterns, a very wise and serious man behind the counter surrounded by PC-Engine games. Yeah, that last bit doesn't apply to Turkish restaurants in North London, sorry. Shekhana Consoles in Wood Green did sell attractive silk neck ties, though, as if there was nothing strange about it. Seriously, whole racks of them.

When *C&VG*, *Mean Machines*, *Ace* and whoever else was telling me to pick up *Joe & Mac: Caveman Ninja* from my local games emporium, I'd try the Manchester places first but usually end up on the phone, nervously breaking in my virginal credit card. Places like Telegames and Console Concepts, I could picture, were probably their local equivalent of Debenhams or John Lewis; several floors of consoles, games, fighting sticks, Super Guns and an air-tight vault containing the Neo Geo AES.

I'd still hang around the 'lesser' games emporiums near Victoria train station and Arndale Centre, pre-IRA bomb strike, just for a sense of what was going on, and a reality check I suppose. *Joe & Mac* was, in fact, "not all that good really" according to the regular staffers who always seemed to address the person just behind you. Yes, they challenged the sacred word of *C&VG*'s Frank O'Connor (long before fame at Bungie) and *Mean Machines'* Rad Automatic. But, they were often right to do so. I'd still go with what Frankie or Rad said out of loyalty.

Even though my local games emporiums were not quite Aladdin's caves of riches, the air of truth about those places is unforgettable.

London's Computer Exchange (remember Charlie Brooker's cartoon-strip ads for it?) was almost what I imagined a real games emporium to be like. But as with similar stores in Manchester (and obviously country wide), it was because of the customers who'd form accurate opinions within minutes of loading up. *Super R-Type* ("Yeah, it looks like the arcade, but the slowdown is loads worse") or Mega Drive *Sword Of Sodan* ("Hah! What's this shit?")

Quite often, even now, when I'm playing through a new game I think back to the games emporiums of old and can almost hear the voices of the regulars just telling it like it is. "S'alright", "Graphics are crap though", "Yeah, that crowd does sound amazing. How much – £60?"

First time I heard *Super Tennis* (SNES) in action was in store. Likewise, first sighting of *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*. Instant successes at the games emporium. You'd know right there and then.

> They challenged the sacred word of Mean Machines' Rad Automatic

REPORTING FROM THE FRONTLINES

CREATOR OF THE YOUR SINCLAIR ROCK 'N' ROLL YEARS INVITES US TO SIGN UP FOR THE FRONTLINES

It would be fair to say that few people have done more for Spectrum appreciation than Nick Humphries. The man behind the excellent The Your Sinclair Rock 'N' Roll Years website, Nick has recently launched *Frontlines*, an associated monthly fanzine/newsletter that reports on happenings in the Sinclair/SAM retro scene. We invited Nick to tell us more.

Retro Gamer: Why did you decide to start up *Frontlines*?
Nick Humphries: Ever since the glorious *ZX Format* ended its run, there hasn't really been a regular fanzine from the Sinclair/SAM retro scene reporting the latest news. *Frontlines* was started up so that projects large and small could get some focused publicity while hopefully reading a bit of interesting editorial.

RG: Why is it not currently available as a PDF?
NH: PDFs are great. However, I'm too much of a perfectionist to create one that doesn't look good, and I currently don't have the extra time needed to format each page to get it to look nice. So I went for the retro feel, which harkened back to the days of fanzines on disk and tape – lots of readable text, simple formatting, and plenty to dip into one lazy afternoon.

RG: How long does it take to create each month?
NH: I don't spend much time on it. I browse various websites every day and make a note of projects to report on as well as editorial ideas. Towards the end of each month I write the first draft in a couple of hours, then sit on it for a few days before scrapping it and writing the final version ready for publication.

RG: How much effort is it to keep the *Your Sinclair* website open?
NH: It can be quite lumpy. Months can pass by without much happening due to real-life stuff, and then I get stuck into something for a few weeks that would soak up most of my spare time. Gone are the days when I can do major stints such as the three solid months scanning 750 articles for the site's tenth anniversary back in 2007, or 18 fantastically hellish months producing the documentary Christmas special.

RG: Why do you think *Your Sinclair* remains popular?
NH: *YS* was a fun magazine written by enthusiastic journos. Little of it has dated, so it's quite fun to dip into every now and then. While the sense of humour became a little childish towards the end of its run, the bulk of it still stands up well on its own. Its influence spread into other publications after *YS*'s death, and now writers such as Charlie Brooker are springing up from their readers and producing phenomenal works themselves.

RG: What can Retro Gamer's readers do to help?
NH: The newsletter thrives on news about people's projects, past, present and future. If they email me via **www.ysrnry.co.uk/email.htm** about their work in progress, I'll report on it in the next issue of *Frontlines* and hopefully get them some interested followers. *



» *Your Sinclair* was a big fan of *Shadow Warriors*, giving it 90% in issue 57. *Your Sinclair* lasted until issue 93, five less than its Newsfield rival *Crash*.





» Nick told us that he got the idea to create *Frontlines* following the demise of *ZX Format*.

* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



I've always had a soft spot for *Your Sinclair* so it's nice to see that Nick is keeping its flame alive. I'd love to see *Frontlines* eventually evolve into a fully fledged fanzine, but at the moment I'm just happy that someone as passionate as Nick is still fully devoted to the scene.

David



It's great to see that Nick is committed to keeping the Spectrum alive and well after all these years. *Frontlines* is slowly progressing into something really exciting, so it's going to be interesting to finally see it in its PDF form. Now all we need is an Amstrad version.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



Tron Wall Crawling R/C Light Cycle

- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £15.50)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Now we weren't really all that taken by *Tron Legacy*, if we're honest. And one of our biggest issues with the film was that there just simply wasn't enough Light Cycle action in it.

Instead valuable viewing time got wasted with the film's three heroes trailing out the boring all-new 'coming to a toy store near you' Light Train, Light Jeep and Light Jet (not sure if that's their official names). In short, it was a little bit like watching an episode of *Tomorrow's World* spliced with *Top Gear*, one in which Hammond, Clarkson and May have to escape a computer hard drive using various vehicles while avoiding the Stig (that'd be Tron).

Anyway, if like us you've always wanted to own your own Light Cycle but are resigned to the fact that A) they would be far too expensive to buy, and B) they don't actually exist in the real world, then this month's treasure will most likely be of real interest to you.

Through the power of some amazing wall-sticking technology these miniaturised versions of the bikes act just like their filmic counterparts. They can crawl up walls while emitting a trail of light. Buy two, of course, and you can engage in an epic and tense Light Cycle battle on your bedroom ceiling or wall with a chum.

SNES Modification

- **RRP:** £25 plus return postage
- **But it from:** www.consolepassion.co.uk

Subscribers to Darran's YouTube channel will be aware that, for a while now, he has been collecting Super Nintendo games, and with a raft of quality import games for the machine there is a lot to benefit by getting the machine modded. Console Passion will do the entire job for just £25, and this includes disabling the lockout chip, adding a 50/60Hz toggle switch, and widening the cart slot to play games of any region. As they warn on their website, there are a few late import releases that still won't play regardless.





Pac-Man Cookie Cutters

- **RRP:** $15.99 (approx £10)
- **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Pac-Man and food are inescapably linked. Not only is Pac based on a picked-at pizza, but his name was inspired by the Japanese onomatopoeia for the sound of furious masticating, and the gameplay was also designed around the concept of eating – something his creator felt would make the game appeal to women, apparently. With this in mind, these cookie cutters that allow you to create tasty biscuits in the shape of Pac-Man, Blinky, Pinky and Inky (no Clyde?) are a perfect marriage of merchandising.



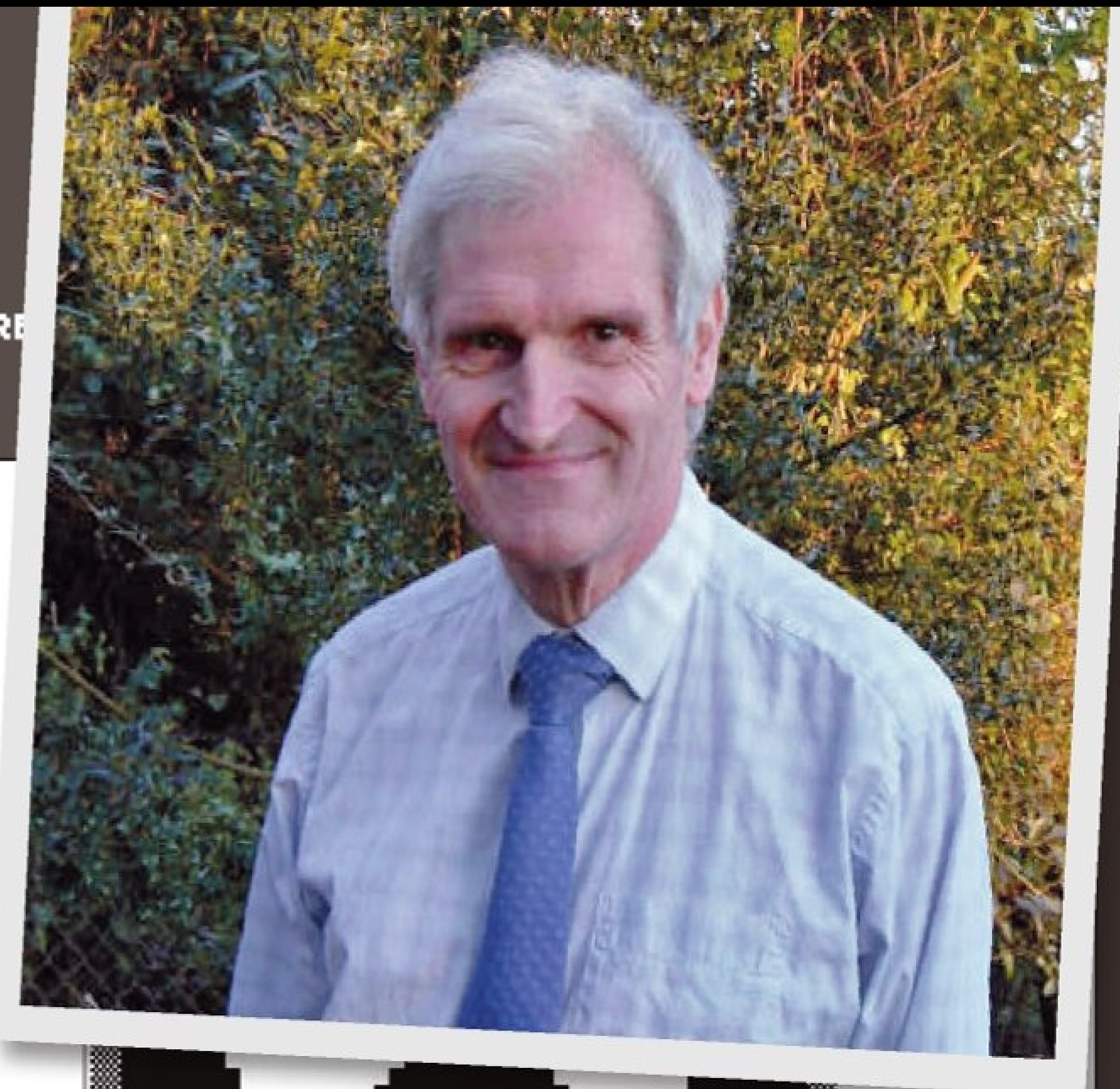
Raccoon T-Shirt

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Super Mario Bros 3 was the first game in the series to give Mario special abilities over his traditional growth and fireball-lobbing powers. It bestowed these magical abilities to the plumber through a series of power-ups, of which included a giant boot that Mario could use like as a means of transport, a frog suit that enhanced his jumping and swimming skills, and a leaf that turned him into a half-Raccoon that could fly. It's that final one that provides the inspiration for this natty T-Shirt from Retro GT.

*A MOMENT WITH… Malcolm Evans

This month, Paul Drury catches up with Malcolm Evans, Sinclair's 3D pioneer



Who is Malcolm Evans?

After writing the ZX81's seminal *3D Monster Maze* for J K Greye, Malcolm founded New Generation Software with his twin brother and enjoyed success with the *Trashman* series.

If you could recommend one of your games what would it be and why?
For the ZX81, it has to be *3D Monster Maze*. It showed that a new dimension in involvement could be achieved in a 3D game on the simplest of computers. For the Spectrum it has to be *Trashman* since it introduced comic events and gave the onlooker something to enjoy.

What's your proudest gaming achievement?
Being remembered astounds me.

And your biggest disappointment?
I have always thought that *Knot In 3D* was better than the confused critics made it out to be. The object was to keep going, building threads in a 3D space. The more you wove around avoiding your own and other's tracks, the more difficult it got, requiring increasing alertness and quick reactions. Some gamers have commented that once they got into it, they thought it was my best game.

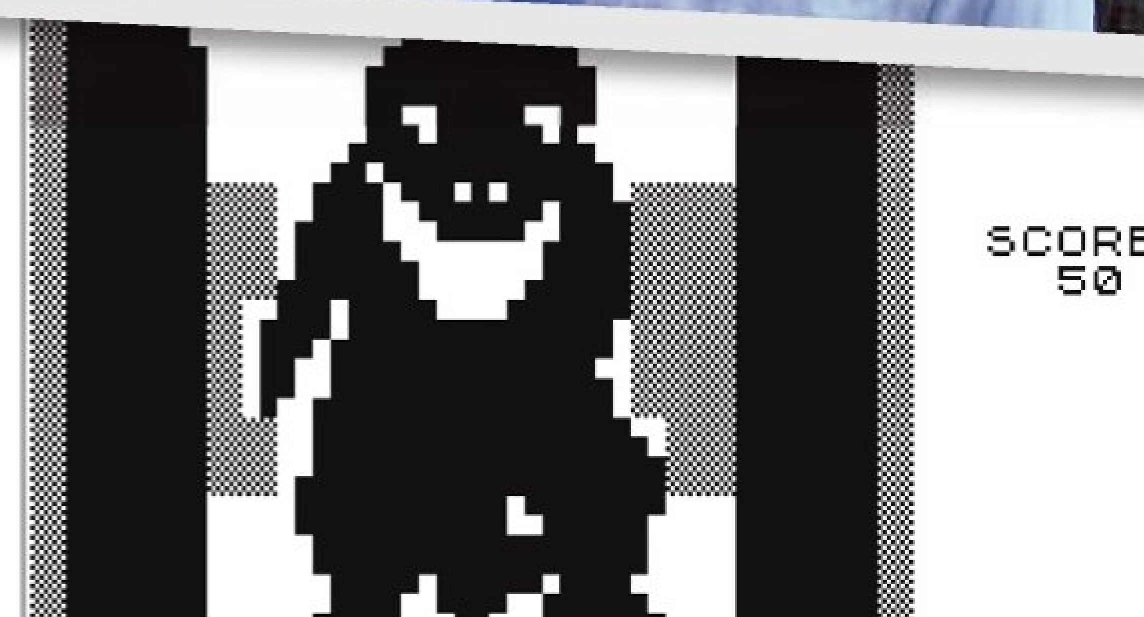
Which other industry veteran do you most admire and why?
Jeff Minter and his llamas. He had a cult following with the originality of his games.

How would you like your games to be remembered?
I am surprised that they are remembered at all! When I wrote them, the life of a game was measured in weeks, or with luck a few months – although *3D Monster Maze* did continue for some time. We never expected a revival and eventually sold the rights to all the games – in hindsight a big mistake. That they are remembered at all is a bonus. That they are still enjoyed is great!

Which game do you wish you had made and why?
Elite because it was the first true 3D game. I am always astounded by the techniques that were used to achieve the speed and compression on the limited 8-bit machines.

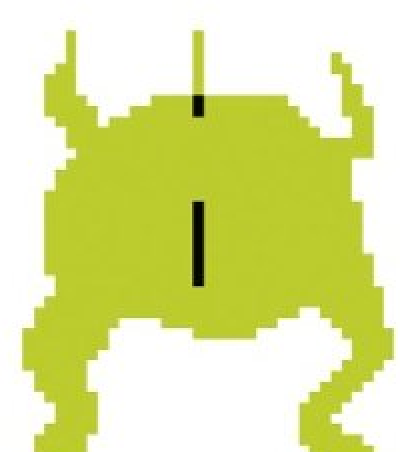
What opportunities has making games given you?
Originally, I had been in the spacecraft industry, designing hardware with a little software. When New Generation folded I returned to that, becoming involved with on-board software. When I started in the industry in the Seventies, there was no software on-board spacecraft.

What's your best memory of being in the games industry?
The friendliness of everyone involved in the industry at the beginning. I have my doubts that the same camaraderie still exists in the more commercial environment of today.



» [ZX81] 3D Monster Maze: early survival horror.

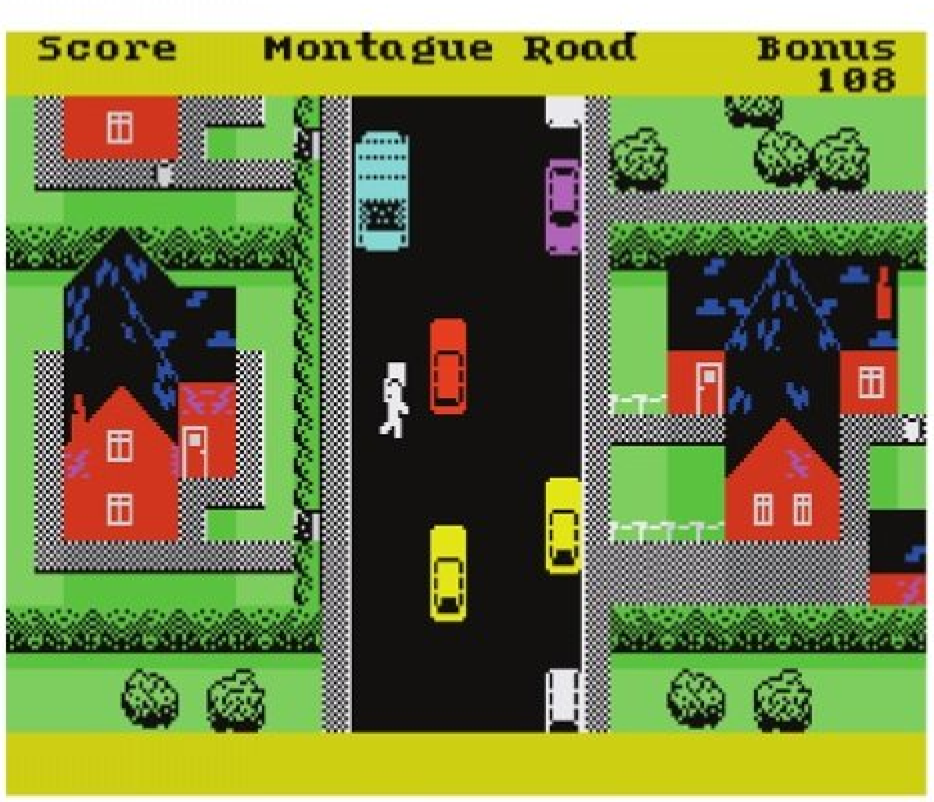
> "Being remembered at all astounds me!"



And your worst?
The creditors' meeting. You are met by a sea of faces determined to catch you out in their enquiries of what went wrong. I don't know whether any of them appreciated that the biggest creditor on the books was me. Only afterwards did our receiver point out that all creditors' legal teams are trained at RADA.

Can you tell us an anecdote about your time in the games industry?
The editor of *Sinclair User* asked me how I came up with the idea of *Trashman*. I told him he would never publish it if I did. He said, try me? So I started, "I was on the loo…" He never did publish it.

Which of your games would you most like to see remade?
That's difficult because all games now are far more involved than the early ones. I think the only one that might have met that criteria was the 3D graphics adventure I never finished. I spent three months on it before realising that we would have had major cash flow problems if I had continued it to completion. *





retrodiary

16 September – 13 October

>> A month of retro events both past and present



16 September 2009
■ *Bubble Bobble Neo*, a remake of the original, is released on XBLA. Among the enhancements is a four-player mode.



17 September 1986
■ Firebird releases *Thrust*, its rendition of *Gravitar*, on the Spectrum. It was excellent and it was only £1.99.



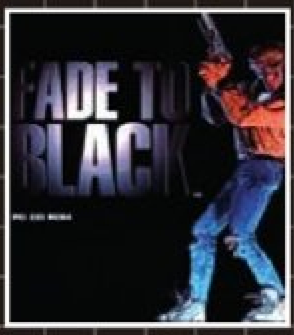
18 September 1987
■ Sega's new console, the Master System, is released in Europe.



19 September 2005
■ The Game Boy Micro, the last in a long line of Game Boy handheld variants, is released in the USA.



20 September 2002
■ The superb 564-meg Neo Geo AES cartridge, *Rage Of The Dragons*, a tag-team head-to-head fighting game, is released.



22 September 1995
■ Delphine's action-adventure sequel to *Flashback*, *Fade To Black*, is released on the PC in the UK.



23 September 2011
■ The latest *Harvest Moon* game, *Grand Bazaar* will be on sale.



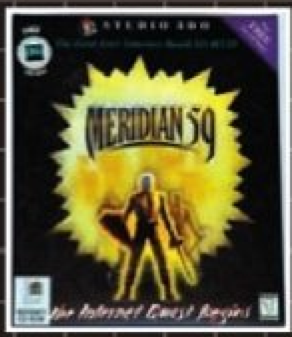
24 September 2001
■ Konami's survival horror sequel, *Silent Hill 2*, debuts in the USA on the PlayStation 2.



25 September 1995
■ Nintendo discontinues the NES after ten years, leaving the SNES as its sole home console.



26 September 2007
■ Microsoft's first-person shooter sequel, *Halo 3*, is released across Europe on the Xbox 360.



27 September 1996
■ *Meridian 59* is released by The 3DO Company. It's credited as the first commercially available 3D MMORPG.



29 September 1995
■ Sony officially releases its new PlayStation console in the UK.



30 September 2011
■ Electronic Arts' annual football release, *FIFA 12*, is due out in Europe on a host of different systems.



1 October 2009
■ The latest incarnation of Sony's PSP handheld console, the PSPgo, is released in Europe and America.



7 October 1991
■ *Mario The Juggler* becomes the last ever release in Nintendo's Game & Watch collection of LCD games.



8 October 1984
■ Automata releases *Deus Ex Machina* on the Spectrum, complete with a synchronised soundtrack in a journey from birth to death.



11 October 1985
■ The innovative yet company-killing *Shadow Of The Unicorn* is released by Mikro-Gen as the first and last Mikro-Plus title.



12 October 1981
■ *Tempest*, the classic arcade coin-op, is released by Atari. Look out for those tankers, flippers and spikers!



13 October 1995
■ Sega's portable Mega Drive handheld, the Nomad, is released in the USA.



13 October 2011
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



CHARTS

DECEMBER 1989



COMMODORE 64	
1	Crazy Cars (Hit Squad)
2	Pitstop 2 (Kixx)
3	Batman: The Movie (Ocean)
4	Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade (US Gold)
5	RoboCop (Ocean)





DECEMBER 1989 – Infogrames starts Civil War, get ready for Space Harrier II, Thalamus has 16-bit balls-up, Level 9 goes HUGE, trio of releases for Joe Blade and Olli & Lissa, and Konix in Epyx failure. Richard Burton waves goodbye to the Eighties…

THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1989

The news from French software house Infogrames was that *North & South*, an arcade strategy game based on the events of the American Civil War, would be released imminently. Strategy isn't everyone's cup of Earl Grey, so Infogrames incorporated several arcade sub-games to appeal to those who might be considering toying with the stuffier side of battlefield stratagem but helping to tempt them in with an arcade softener.

Strangely the 16-bit versions arrived on time and were every bit as good as promised. The various 8-bit conversions were delayed and decided to make a belated appearance early into 1991 but were also superb.

Widely advertised across the gaming press and threatening to be one of Grandslam's more successful offerings was *The Seven Gates Of Jambala*. The premise cast you as a wannabe wizard who has to embark on a mission to piece together a seven-part magic wand across seven levels of scrolling platform arcade adventureness.

Despite the rather hackneyed story and formulaic game, the Atari ST and Amiga versions of *Jambala* proved to be worthy of further investigation, particularly for some terrific in-game music. The promised Commodore 64 port was advertised but failed to materialise, with the programmers barely making a start on the conversion.

Grandslam also revealed that it had bagged the rights to Sega's *Space Harrier II*. Sega had already released the game on the Mega Drive back in October 1988 as a launch title for the Mega Drive console in Japan, so Grandslam would be doing the home computer conversions for ST, Amiga and the big three 8-bit systems.

Mindroll, a game from Stavros Fasoulas, was due out soon and was essentially a 16-bit upgrade of his Commodore 64 hit *Quedex*, the rolling ball maze game. While the original C64 version was an innovative and original game and a pleasure to play, *Mindroll* on the Amiga, despite having some great graphics, just seemed to be labouring in its attempt to re-create the original magic of *Quedex*. It was certainly not helped by unresponsive controls and rather lacklustre presentation.

Having recently retired from writing adventures, Level 9 let slip that it had developed a new game-authoring system entitled HUGE, which stood for wHoly Universal Games Engine. We know… it's an awful name…

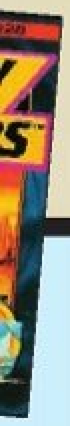
The system consisted of a high-level programming language with separate compilers for each format. According to Level 9, this meant that an alteration to a piece of gaming code in an Amiga game could be taken and compiled instantly, without requiring any rewriting, to

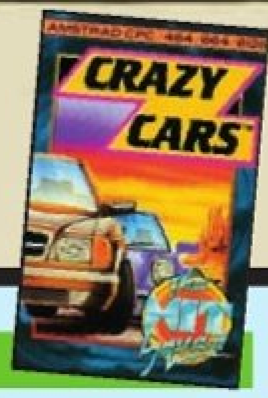


» [Spectrum] All the *Olli & Lissa* games were splendid cartoon adventures, and the third and final instalment was no exception.



» [Amstrad] Strategy with a dab of arcade was a winning formula for Infogrames' *North & South*.









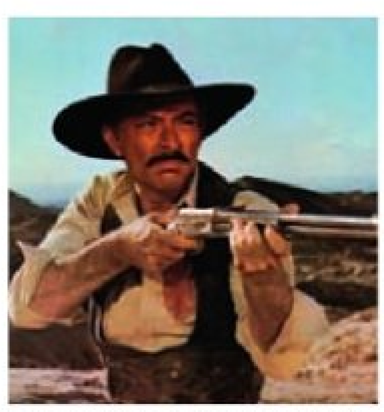
AMSTRAD	
1	Crazy Cars (Hit Squad)
2	MIG-29 (Codemasters)
3	Twin Turbo V8 (Codemasters)
4	RoboCop (Ocean)
5	Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade (US Gold)

SPECTRUM	
1	Batman: The Movie (Ocean)
2	Crazy Cars (Hit Squad)
3	Batman: The Caped Crusader (Hit Squad)
4	Treasure Island Dizzy (Codemasters)
5	Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade (US Gold)

MUSIC	
1	Do They Know It's Christmas? (Band Aid II)
2	Let's Party (Jive Bunny & The Mastermixers)
3	When You Come Back To Me (Jason Donovan)
4	Get A Life (Soul II Soul)
5	You Got It (The Right Stuff) (New Kids On The Block)

DECEMBER 1989 NEWS

5 December saw Margaret Thatcher victorious in a Conservative leadership battle against the challenge of backbencher Sir Anthony Meyer. Despite the resounding success, there was a feeling of disquiet among the ranks, and within a year Thatcher had been ousted, after failing to receive the backing of her Cabinet for a second challenge. She resigned, replaced by John Major, the grey man of politics.


» Lee Van Cleef dies, though not at the hands of Clint Eastwood.

16 December brought the passing of a Spaghetti Western legend, American actor Lee Van Cleef. He starred in many important movies but was best remembered for his roles in *A Few Dollars More* and *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*.

His first movie was in 1952, the memorable western *High Noon*, starring Gary Cooper. Van Cleef also played a role in the cult classic *Escape From New York* in 1984. He died of a heart attack aged 64. His gravestone reads: 'The best of the bad.'

On 6 December the BBC unwisely cancelled one of its all-time favourite shows. *Doctor Who* was wound up after 26 series from its launch in November 1963. In that time, seven actors played the role of the Doctor and brought us many wonderful foes including the Master, Davros, the Cybermen, the Sontarans and, of course, the Daleks.

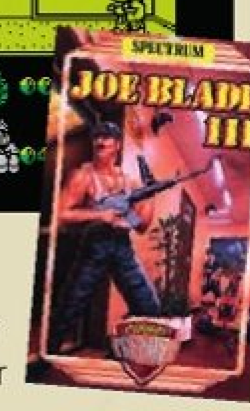
After a failed US-backed relaunch attempt in 1996, common sense won out and the Doctor was regenerated in the form of Christopher Eccleston for a new series, which began in March 2005.

» [Amiga] Welcome to the Fantasy Zone… again. Sadly not as good as the original.



» [Spectrum] The third outing for *Joe Blade* was totally unoriginal but still thoroughly enjoyable to play.





work faultlessly on a PC, Atari ST or other format. It all sounds rather fantastic.

Level 9 was developing a game called *Champion Of The Raj* for PSS, a war strategy game for the Amiga, PC and ST. Later into 1991 it also developed *The Legend Of Billy The Kid* for Ocean Software. They both had overtones of Cinemaware titles and both used the HUGE system. Sadly both were mediocre, and from there Level 9 only worked on one more project: the PC DOS conversion of Cinemaware's *It Came From The Desert*.

Sega Master System owners were in for a platform gaming treat with news that Sega's latest game, *Psycho Fox*, was due out very soon. It would be a side-scrolling platform game and would become a must-have title for the Master System. The option to transfer gameplay between three other characters, each having their own abilities that must be used to further your progress, really helped to single out *Psycho Fox*.

Publisher Players had a sequel to a sequel ready for release on its Players Premier budget label. *Joe Blade 3* would see more of the bouncy little soldier fella doing what he does best, rescuing hostages from the hands of the evil Krax Bloodfinger. Originality may not be the series' strong suit, but the nicely paced action and playability of the game made this and the *Joe Blade* series a pleasant budget distraction at a smidge under £3. Sadly *Joe Blade 3* only made it onto Amstrad and Spectrum formats, where the series seemed to fare better.

Another 8-bit budget favourite out soon for its third outing was *Olli & Lissa*. The cutesy platform game also followed the same recipe as its predecessors, citing the 'if it ain't broke' adage. However, the third instalment was released on the Cartoon Time label, which was part of the Codemasters empire, while the two earlier games were both released on BT's Silverbird range.

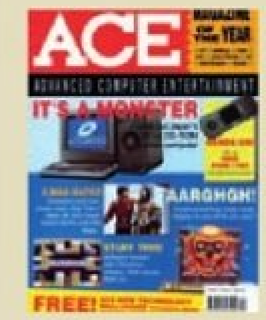
The Konix Multisystem console looked to be officially doomed. Rumours flying around the gaming world claimed that the system was dead and buried, with financial problems cited as the primary cause, not helped by American software developer Epyx going bankrupt while owing Konix a small fortune.

The Power Chair was undergoing yet another redesign, as the gearing was being replaced by vinyl belts rather than the clunky, noisy hardware it was currently using. All of this was inconsequential, however, with Konix invariably heading towards the hardware graveyard in the sky…

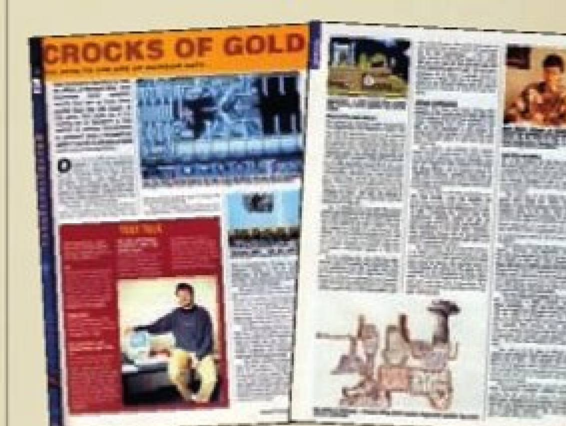
Computer & Video Games cast an eye over the last crop of games for the decade, with a varied bunch highlighted for possible insertion into your Christmas stocking: *Ghostbusters II* (Activision, Atari ST), *Double Dragon II* (Virgin, Atari ST), *Turbo OutRun* (US Gold, C64), *Rock 'N Roll* (Rainbow Arts, Amiga), *Damocles* (Novagen, Atari ST), *Ninja Warriors* (Virgin, Amiga), *Switchblade* (Gremlin Graphics, Amiga), *Hard Drivin'* (Domark, Atari ST), *Scapeghost* (Level 9, Amiga), *Toobin'* (Domark, Amiga), *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (US Gold, Spectrum/Amstrad), *Hyper Sports* (Hit Squad, C64) and *Ghosts 'N Goblins* (Encore, C64/Spectrum).

THIS MONTH IN…

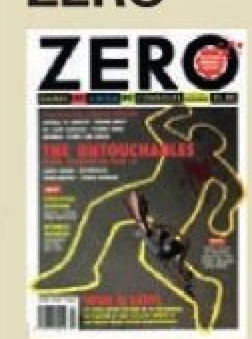
ACE



ACE visited Rainbow Arts and spoke to its product development supremo, Teut Weidemann. He had forthright views, including that all Spectrums, Amstrads and STs should be burned. He also thought that if Atari got the Lynx marketing right, the Game Boy wouldn't stand a chance.



ZERO



Zero had a rather quirky interview with musician Captain Sensible, talking about his computing history and, of course, music. His current machine was an Atari ST, but when pressed about his favourite game it was the Commodore 64 version of *Beach-Head* by US Gold.



CRASH



Codemasters was polishing its shiny discs in readiness for the release of its CD-based compilation of 30 games. For £19.99 you would get a CD and a data cable to connect your CD player to your Spectrum, with games loading in just 20 seconds.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



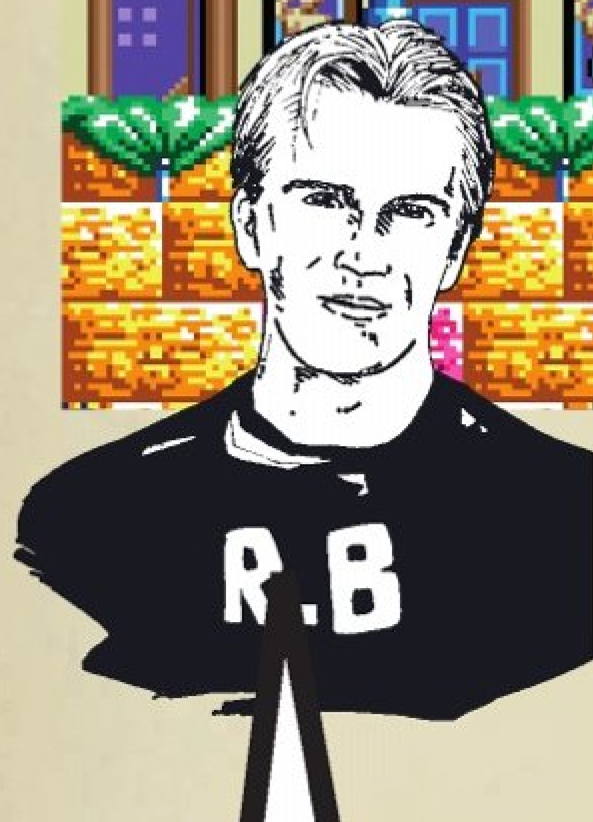
»[Mega Drive] *Dynamite Headdy*: an excellent action-platformer that saw you frequently lose your head.



»[Mega Drive] *Stargate* was a run-of-the-mill scrolling platform game, despite the big movie license.



»[NES] The sole console release of *Elite* occurred on the NES. Sadly the mooted Mega Drive version drifted off into space.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 1994

MAY 1994 – Elite is never Mega, Sega 32X arrives, Sega's Neptune doesn't, Bandai Playdia shouldn't have bothered, Shaq Fu just shouldn't have, while there were Super Skidmarks all over the CD32. Richard Burton gets excited and touches cloth…

It may have been around for more years than many would care to remember, but *Elite*, the Braben/Bell space-trading epic, was reportedly signed up for release on Sega's Mega Drive (with Sony planning to do the conversion itself). Just think what sort of *Elite* we could have had with all that extra power? Disappointingly, Mega Drive *Elite* never saw the light of day; the 1991 NES version the only console release for *Elite*.

Acclaim Entertainment let slip that it had bagged the rights to the new MGM sci-fi movie due out at the end of the year. *Stargate* would tell the story of galaxy-jumping using ancient alien transportation devices; this side-scrolling platformer tasked you with saving your lost colleagues and battling a tetchy Sun God. Both the game and the movie were due out around November, and both were entertaining.

News reports hinted that Sega were planning to release another console ahead of its forthcoming Sega Saturn. Much excitement ensued, intermingled with occasional head-scratching as to why Sega needed another machine. The hardware turned out not to be a console at all, but a Genesis/Mega Drive add-on: the Sega 32X.

It plugged into the Mega Drive like a cartridge, much like the Power Base which allowed Master System games to be played. It was thought that the 32X, with its 32 bit technology, would enhance games and give longevity to the Mega Drive lifespan given that it was coming under increasing pressure from Nintendo's SNES.

Sadly, the idea was ill-conceived and the 32X bombed spectacularly. There were hardly any 32X-specific software releases and the cost of the unit, around £170, priced itself out of the market. Having announced the Sega Saturn was under development and due for release around the same time as the 32X (in Japan at least) added to Sega's marketing woes.

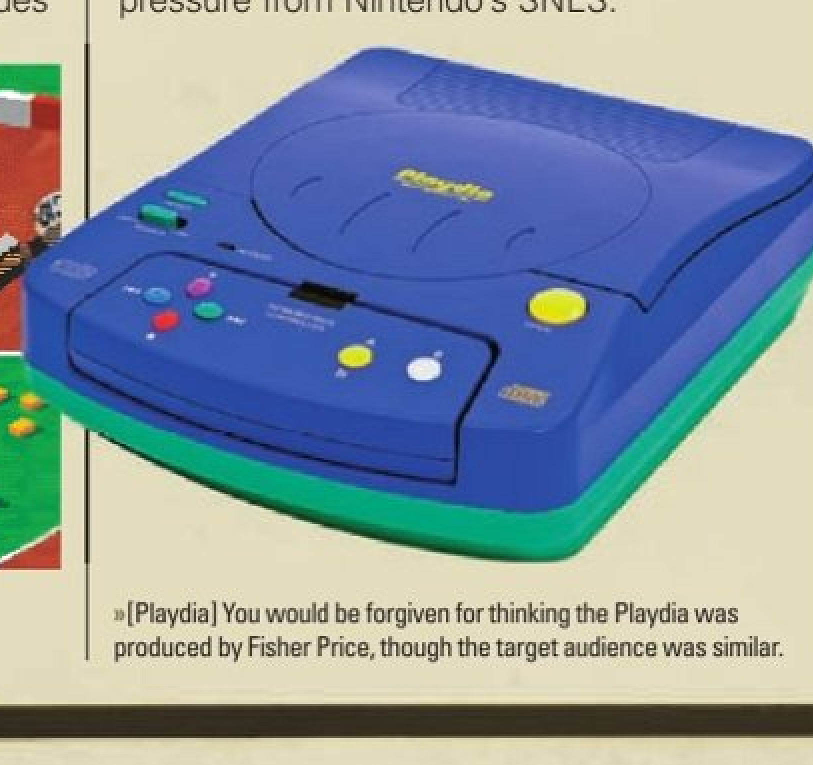
Stranger still was the decision by Sega to push the 32X further by combining it with a Mega Drive into an all-in-one system, which was going to be christened the Sega Neptune. This became a non-starter, with the Saturn due for release by the time Sega had a prototype for the Neptune. Inevitably the project was mothballed.

Bandai announced that its new console planned to release that year; the Bandai Playdia would be ready for its launch in October. The Playdia was a CD-based system that was targeting younger gamers, with its software being mostly Manga-styled educational titles – most of which were simplistic full motion video affairs.

It made virtually no impact in Japan, where it remained exclusively marooned in console limbo. It wasn't released anywhere else, presumably in view of its awful sales. Bandai were also the only software developer for the system, and despite the limited range of games (just over 30) and their limited range of gameplay (think



»[Amiga CD32] *Super Sprint* crashes into *Micro Machines* creating *Super Skidmarks*. A simply brilliant game.



»[Playdia] You would be forgiven for thinking the Playdia was produced by Fisher Price, though the target audience was similar.

MAY 1994 NEWS

1 May saw Ayrton Senna, the Brazilian Formula 1 racing driver, tragically killed during the San Marino Grand Prix. Senna's death occurred just a day after the Austrian driver Roland Ratzenberger crashed during qualifying, dying shortly afterwards from the injuries sustained. Senna ran wide on a corner smashing into a concrete barrier at just over 190mph, suffering massive head and brain injuries. Race officials later found an Austrian flag in Senna's smashed car which he planned to unfurl at the end of the race in honour of Ratzenberger.

6 May saw the opening of the Channel Tunnel by HM The Queen and French president François Mitterrand. The 31-mile-long undersea rail-link between Folkestone in Kent and Coquelles in Calais began construction in 1988, with both ends of the tunnel meeting on 30 October.


» *Pulp Fiction* missed out on the best picture Oscar the next year, beaten by *Forrest Gump*.

25 May saw the Camelot consortium win the rights to run the first national lottery in the UK, with the chance to win upwards of £5 million in each lottery draw with the first due to be held on 19 November.

May also saw the premiere of *Pulp Fiction* at the Cannes Film Festival, where it won the top prize: the Palme d'Or. Starring John Travolta, Samuel L Jackson and Uma Thurman, the film received critical acclaim and success at the cinema.

Dragon's Lair for comparison) the Playdia did offer up one nugget of innovation with its wireless infrared controller.

Electronic Arts had their own piece of gaming crud looming over the horizon with news they had signed up humongous basketball player Shaquille O'Neal for a scrolling beat-'em-up entitled *Shaq-Fu*.

So how do you crowbar a basketball legend into a fighting game? Well, on his way to a charity basketball match in Japan he strays into a dojo and is transported to another dimension. From there on it's all downhill… *Shaq Fu* appeared on most Sega systems, SNES and also the Amiga. Sadly, each and every version was a steaming turd of a game…

Treasure's latest project was developing nicely according to reports. Its scrolling platform game sounded like old hat, but we hadn't reckoned on a character called Dynamite Headdy. The hero with the interchangeable heads was here to save puppet land from King Dark Demon, but more importantly, to show gamers that platform games could be imaginative and simply not the run-of-the-mill toss that many developers seemed happy to flood onto the market.



» [SNES] They say *Shaq Fu*, we say Shaq Poo… with extra flies.

Dynamite Headdy was eventually released on Sega consoles and rightfully lauded over. Even the 32X was promised a version, which, to no one's surprise, didn't materialise.

What's better than *Skidmarks*? *Super Skidmarks,* that's what. Acid Software were working on an enhanced Amiga CD32 version of the hit game released on the Amiga a few short months before. The racing game, akin to *Super Sprint* and *Micro Machines,* sees you race detailed little cars around a multitude of taxing tracks. The range of vehicles to race was sublime: from VWs, to F1 cars, or the option of towing a caravan. A brilliant game as it stood, but simply awesome when played multiplayer.

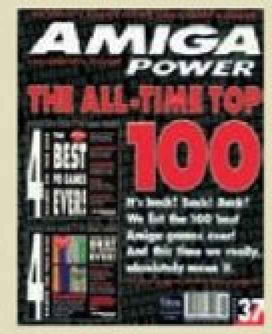
Sadly, *Skidmarks*, super or otherwise, was initially only available to Amiga owners; although a Mega Drive/Genesis version was later released by Codemasters, albeit still coded by Acid Software – and therefore it still played splendidly well.

The One Amiga had a rather good cross-section of high ranking games reviews, both full-price and budget re-release, to feast upon this month. The crème de la crème of Amiga gaming were *K240* (Gremlin Graphics), *Armour-Geddon II: Codename Hellfire* (Psygnosis), *Arcade Pool* (Team 17), *Kings Quest VI* (Sierra), *Ultimate Body Blows* (Team 17, CD32), *Apocalypse* (Virgin Games), *Eye Of The Beholder II* (Kixx), *Utopia* (GBH), *Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker* (Hit Squad), and *Award Winners* (Empire).

Nintendo-loving *Superplay* were super stingy with their percentage scores this month. Despite there being a bumper crop of games up for rating, all but *Side Pocket* (Data East) and *Mega-Lo-Mania* (Imagineer) were considered woefully average.

THIS MONTH IN…

AMIGA POWER



Predominant feature of the month was *Amiga Power*'s annual rundown of the 100 best Amiga games ever. Sensible Software must have been particularly proud as it created the top two titles: *Sensible Soccer* (first for another year), and its new title, *Cannon Fodder.*



SUPER PLAY



Superplay ran a feature on conversion and cheat adaptors, such as Game Genie and Action Replay 2, to find the best suited to playing imported games. However, a problem arose which harked back to the days of the ZX81, that of a wobbly connection, leading to the system crashing.



MEAN MACHINES SEGA

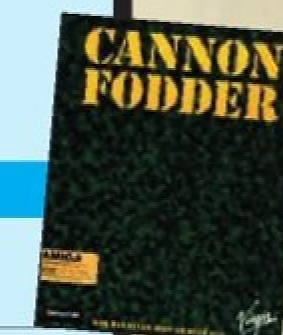


A detailed update on the development of *Rise Of The Robots* stood out, if only for some cracking quotes from the creators. They pointed out that 'recent releases were all presentation without the gameplay to match.' Pot. Kettle. Very, very black.



CHARTS

MAY 1994



AMIGA

1 Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
2 Frontier: Elite 2 (Gametek)
3 Liberation (Mindscape)
4 Premier Manager 2 (Gremlin Graphics)
5 The Settlers (Blue Byte)



SNES

1 Sensible Soccer (Sony)
2 NBA Jam (Acclaim)
3 Super Empire Strikes Back (JVC)
4 Winter Olympics (US Gold)
5 Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)

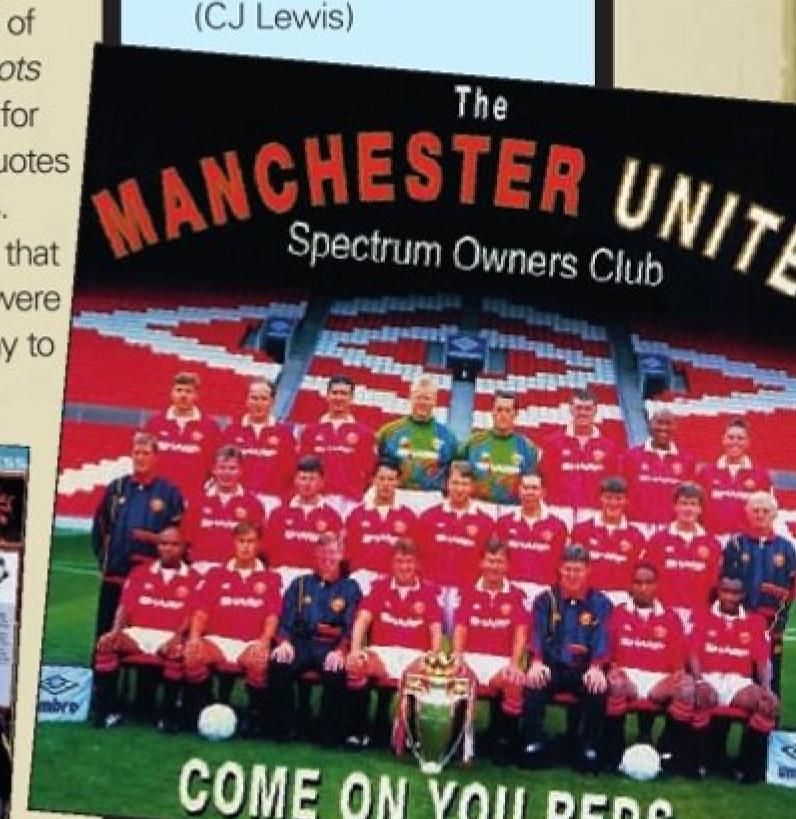


COMMODORE 64

1 Street Fighter II (Kixx)
2 Creatures (Kixx)
3 The Addams Family (Hit Squad)
4 Bubble Bobble (Hit Squad)
5 Manchester United Europe (Buzz)

MUSIC

1 Come On You Reds (Manchester United Football Squad)
2 Inside (Stiltskin)
3 The Real Thing (Tony Di Bart)
4 Love Is All Around (Wet Wet Wet)
5 Sweets For My Sweet (CJ Lewis)





Mortal Kombat II

MOOOOOORTAL KOMBAT…TWOOOOOOOOOO

#42

» SUPER NINTENDO
» MIDWAY
» 1994

***Mortal Kombat II* had many releases across various systems in the mid-Nineties, and the biggest debate was always which version was superior. Both versions have their ups and downs, but the Super Nintendo version always came out on top in my eyes.**

Nintendo's censorship of the first *MK* hurt the sales so bad they decided not to turn the blood into sweat in this version; instead opting for a warning sticker on the box to highlight the violence contained. Although in the Japanese version the blood remained censored, this time made green in colour.

The Super Nintendo port was produced by Sculptured Software and, despite running in the very peculiar SNES standard 256x224 resolution, was more colourful and also utilised the Mode 7 special effects.

Onto the differences between the games and the versions: the European version received a different logo, as opposed to the US version which didn't get that until the second cart revision. And in later versions Johnny Cage's shadow kick leaves a red trail instead of the original green one. Why this change was implemented is unknown.

The character roster is nearly double the size of the original game's. Johnny Cage, Raiden, Liu Kang, Sub Zero, Scorpion and Shang Tsung all return (Sonya Blade and Kano became prisoners to boss Shao Khan), and were joined by Jax, Baraka, the ninja sisters Kitana and Mileena, and Reptile. Three non-playable ninjas were also introduced: Smoke, and the infamous Noob Saibot, along with female ninja Jade.

Fatalities became even more brutal in the sequel, but with them the game's silliness factor began escalating as turning characters into babies and befriending them became new ways to proclaim yourself victor.

While it's refreshing to see a fighting game poke fun at the genre, it also began to turn the *MK* franchise into a big joke instead of a serious fighting game. The series still to this day has problems shaking that image. However, in my eyes, *Mortal Kombat II* on Super NES remains the top of the ports, and the best game in the series. *



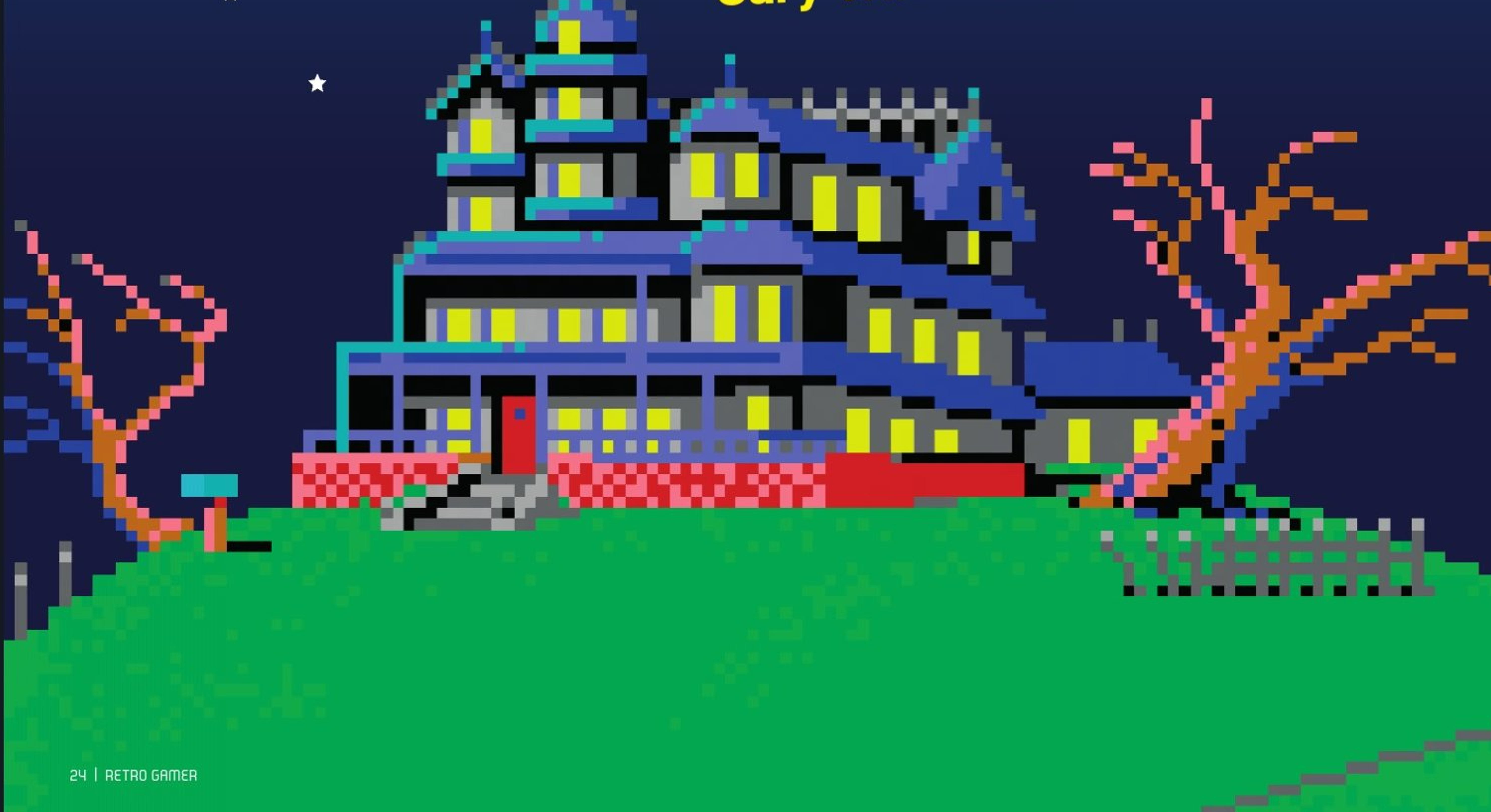
RETROBATE PROFILE

- » **NAME:** MICHAEL LEVY
- » **JOINED:** 6 OCTOBER
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- » **OCCUPATION:** JOURNALIST/TECH SUPPORT REP
- » **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** SUPER NINTENDO

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Maniac Mansion

Danger meets a sense of humour, a spooky mansion, a missing cheerleader and a disembodied tentacle wanting to make it in the music biz. These are just some of the ingredients of one of the best adventure games ever made. Stuart Hunt speaks to Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick to learn more



Forget for one moment its hilarious script and seminal SCUMM engine. *Maniac Mansion* proved that videogames could capture the essence of an entirely different medium and opened our eyes to the wonderful things that happened when they placed their interactive stamp on them.

For the benefit of those who have never played *Maniac Mansion* before, it's a comedy adventure game with a story that takes place inside a big, creepy house occupied by a family of complete oddballs. The family's odd behaviour started 20 years ago when a strange, sentient meteorite crashed near their home. Due to the peculiar mind-controlling properties of this strange slab of space rock, the patriarch of the family, Dr Fred Edison, spends a large portion of his evenings sucking the brains from poor humans for use in bizarre scientific experiments. This behaviour is accepted and positively encouraged by his wife Edna and son Weird Ed, but also hasn't gone entirely unnoticed by one outsider.

When pretty cheerleader Sandy Pantz mysteriously disappears without a trace, her boyfriend, Dave Miller, immediately suspects that the mad doctor is responsible, and with the help of two friends plots a daring mission to break into the mansion and rescue her before it's too late.

It's a story that seeks to emulate those countless cheesy horror films in which a group of teenagers enter a creepy-looking house and are gradually, and gruesomely, removed from the picture one by one. Of course, what made *Maniac Mansion*'s version of that well-told tale so special is that you got to call the shots.

An idea conceived by two men, programmer Ron Gilbert and graphic artist Gary Winnick, *Maniac Mansion* became a landmark title in 1987 thanks to its improved point-and-click interface, which helped change the way the adventure game was played. That it encompassed both great gameplay and innovation comes as little surprise when we asked Ron to explain when it was that he discovered an interest in videogames.

"My interest in videogames squarely revolved around making and programming them," he says. "One of my close friends had an Atari 2600 and we'd spend hours playing *Pac-Man* and *Missile Command*, and I'd wonder how the hell they were programmed."

That fascination would see Ron learn to program on his father's programmable calculator, and later hone his skills writing his first games on a Commodore 64. It also saw him get his break in the industry not off the back of a computer game but a graphic manipulation extension he wrote for the C64's custom BASIC language. It was this that landed him a job at Californian software developer/publisher Human Engineered Software (HESware) and, through a colleague at work, later led to a temporary contract at a fledgling Lucasfilm Games.

At the time, game designer Noah Falstein (co-designer of the classic Williams shooter *Sinistar*) was leading the development for the Lucasfilm game *Koronis Rift* and offered Ron a three-month contracting job to do the C64 programming on the game. It was during the project that Ron met Gary and a significant friendship was struck.



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** LUCASFILM GAMES
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **PLATFORM:** APPLE II, C64, PC, AMIGA, ATARI ST, NES
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE



MANIAC MANSION

"Ron and I started hanging around with each other while he was working on the C64 port of *Koronis Rift*," remembers Gary. "I believe I was working on *Labyrinth*. I think we both were working later in the evening at the time. We discovered we shared a similar sensibility for the same twisted humour, enjoyed the same movies and television programmes."

Shortly afterwards, Ron was taken on full-time at Lucasfilm Games, and his and Gary's chats soon turned to discussions of working together on a graphic adventure game.

"Ron had been playing some Sierra graphic adventure games and showed me *King's Quest* and *Space Quest*," recalls Gary. "We started toying with the idea of doing our own graphic adventure. I think we had watched some ridiculous teen horror movie; I really can't remember the title, but it was one of those plots where a group of teenagers end up in a creepy house and get slaughtered one after another, and of course no one ever thinks of getting the hell out of there. We continued discussing the movie and similar ones we had seen – *Friday The 13th*, *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, etc – and talking about all the similar horror movie clichés. We kept noodling the idea, and some time later I drew a sketch of a creepy house with a sign out front: 'Trespassers will be horribly mutilated'. Also, early on we came up with the idea of a deranged mad scientist/doctor type who lived there that eventually evolved into Dr Fred."

The idea of *Maniac Mansion* came about as a result of Ron's interest in adventure games, the pair's mutual love for bad horror flicks, and a strong desire to meld the two. Which movies in particular helped inspire and inform *Maniac Mansion*'s look and design, though? "Just about everything campy," answers Ron. "Gary and I loved *Re-Animator*, and *Little Shop Of Horrors* had just come out, so that's where we stole… I mean 'paid homage to' the big man-eating plant."





> **"Little Shop Of Horrors had just come out, so that's where we stole the big man-eating plant"**

But while you could argue that *Maniac Mansion*'s story wasn't wholly original, given that it was mainly conceived as a collage of ideas from a range of horror film sources, it did bring a number of innovative concepts and ideas to the adventure genre.

As well as providing the birthing room for the famous SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*) engine, *Maniac Mansion* was also notable for being one of the first computer games to have 'proper' alternative endings, cinematic cut-scenes that offered players subtle visual clues to help solve puzzles, fiendish brainteasers that offered more than one solution, and a varied cast of playable characters that each exhibited a different combination of characteristics and skills.

Its cast of seven adolescents ranged from the geeky in bespectacled Bernard, whose speciality was fixing electronic devices, to the edgy with New Wave musician Syd, who wore shades and a dark skinny suit. In fact, pretty much all the stereotypical high school cliques were present and included – the jock, the nerd, and even the photographer for the school newspaper.



» [Famicom] In the Famicom version, the kids look completely different. It also features flick-screen scrolling, and some background graphics and music are missing.

EXPERT OPINION

CHARLES CECIL

co-founder of Revolution Studios, developer of *Broken Sword* and *Beneath A Steel Sky*

"I am deeply ashamed to admit that I missed *Maniac Mansion* first time around. In the late Eighties I was head of development at Activision, which was publishing Sierra adventure games, so I was more in tune with the *King's Quest* and *Leisure Suit Larry* adventures. And then, as Revolution was being conceived, the big titles from LucasArts were *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* and, of course, *Monkey Island*. I do rate *Maniac Mansion*'s sequel, *Day Of The Tentacle*, which came a couple of years later, as one of the best adventures ever."







» [NES] Cut-scenes occasionally interrupt the gameplay. They not only drive the story but also offer subtle clues to how to solve certain puzzles.

While popular class presidential candidate Dave Miller was a compulsory member of the rescue party, players had the freedom to select two of his chums to accompany him into the mansion, and picking which two characters to take was appealing for many gamers. It allowed them to tailor their experience, experiment with their selections and replay the game over with different combinations, sometimes revealing new events in the story but always eking more longevity from the game.

Maniac Mansion could be completed using any combination of characters, but your selection affected how you would have to go about solving the puzzles. In short, your choice would influence the storyline and make the mission easier or more challenging. It had a bearing on the ending too, of which there were multiple outcomes – both good and bad.

Considering how important a part the choice of multiple characters would play in *Maniac Mansion*'s design and popularity, we were especially interested to find out how Ron and Gary selected their memorable cast. Were they based on anybody they knew? Their own school friends, perhaps?

"Yeah, they and all the characters are based on real people," answers Ron, "but I can't say who because I'd get in a lot of trouble. I have heard some people say Nurse Edna was based on my mom, which is completely false. There was a lot of back and forth on the kids and who they were. We came up with a lot of ideas and eventually narrowed it down to the seven that you played with. The final list was chosen based on who was funny and if we came up with good puzzles for them."

And the origins of the kooky Edison clan? "I believe it was a combination of movie characters," Gary answers. "Also, for me, a bit of a twist on EC Horror comic books and Warren magazine mascot characters, and a bit of a few people we knew thrown in as well."

While *Maniac Mansion*'s varied cast continues to set it apart from other adventure games today, perhaps the most important element of the game's design was the mansion itself. The thing that draws and holds all the characters, gags and ideas together, it was crucial it had a sense of both grandeur and creepiness. To achieve this, and to also inject a real sense of architectural authenticity into its walls, it's rumoured that Gary used the main house on Skywalker Ranch as the main inspiration when coming up with the look of the Edison's eerie abode.

"That's true. I looked at the main house for the exterior," confirms Gary. "I also based the library, including the spiral staircase, on the Skywalker library. Trust me, if you were actually there and designing a rambling mansion, it was a great place to research. Most of the rest of the layout is only inspired by – not really based on as any accurate representation."

Working on *Maniac Mansion* was a close-knit trio that comprised Ron, Gary and programmer David Fox (creator of *Rescue On Fractalus!*), who also contributed to the dialogue in the game, while their colleagues Aric Wilmunder and Brad Taylor would later pitch in to assist on the PC port of the SCUMM engine. With *Maniac Mansion* being the first title on which both Ron and Gary ever worked as project leads, however, you might have expected

MANIAC TELEVISION

WITH ITS CAST of quirky characters, and a premise that slotted quite comfortably into the land of broadcast television, Lucasfilm saw the ideal opportunity to turn *Maniac Mansion* into a sitcom. And that's exactly what it did. The show was a collective effort between Lucasfilm, Atlantis Films and The Family Channel, where it aired in the States. It was also broadcast on YTV in Canada. The show was well received by critics, lasting for three seasons, and 66 episodes were filmed. Created by Eugene Levy (*American Pie*, *Splash*), the story focused on the Edison family, who inherit the mansion and then move in, unaware that a mysterious meteorite with supernatural properties lies nearby.

"That was a surreal experience," remembers Ron when we ask him about his and Gary's input into the show. "Gary and I didn't have any involvement in it, but we were really excited that one of our games was going to be made into a TV show. It started out being very much like the game, but as time went on, we'd get these memos from the production arm of Lucasfilm, and each one contained some element of the game that would no longer be in the TV show. 'Nurse Edna will no longer be called Nurse Edna.' It became a joke at some point."







DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MANIAC MANSION: DAY OF THE TENTACLE (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, MAC
YEAR: 1993

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
SYSTEM: AMIGA, ST, PC, MAC, MEGA-CD, FM TOWNS MARTY
YEAR: 1990

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
SYSTEM: AMIGA, PC, MAC, FM TOWNS MARTY
YEAR: 1992

EXPERT OPINION

DAVE GROSSMAN
Creator of *The Secret Of Monkey Island* and *Day Of The Tentacle*

"*Maniac Mansion* is not merely a great, hilarious, complex game that revolutionised a genre. It also somehow fits into 64K, which, in my opinion, qualifies it as genuine magic. It even has an excellent soundtrack! Yes, and it wasn't easy to write music that sounded good coming out of the nominal audio hardware that was built in to PCs in those days. More magic."



» [PC] SCUMM really spoils you on older adventures, since you don't need to be a human thesaurus.



Lucasfilm management to have been keeping a very close eye on its progress and content, especially on some of its more risqué humour. But, in actual fact, quite the opposite was true.

"We had very little oversight, which is one of the things I credit for Lucasfilm coming out with so many classic games back then," explains Ron. "We did what was fun and funny. One thing we had to cut that I clearly remember was one of the opening lines. Dave says: 'Don't be a tuna head.' This was originally 'Don't be a shit head', but we were told to change it. We argued with the head of [Lucasfilm Games], and I'm sure we talked about our 'artistic vision' and other stuff. In the end our boss told Gary and me to go away and think about why we wanted to swear. If we came back with a good reason, we could keep it. But we couldn't. It really taught me an important lesson about writing and how and why you choose the words you do. It's one of the main reasons you won't see swearing in a game I do."

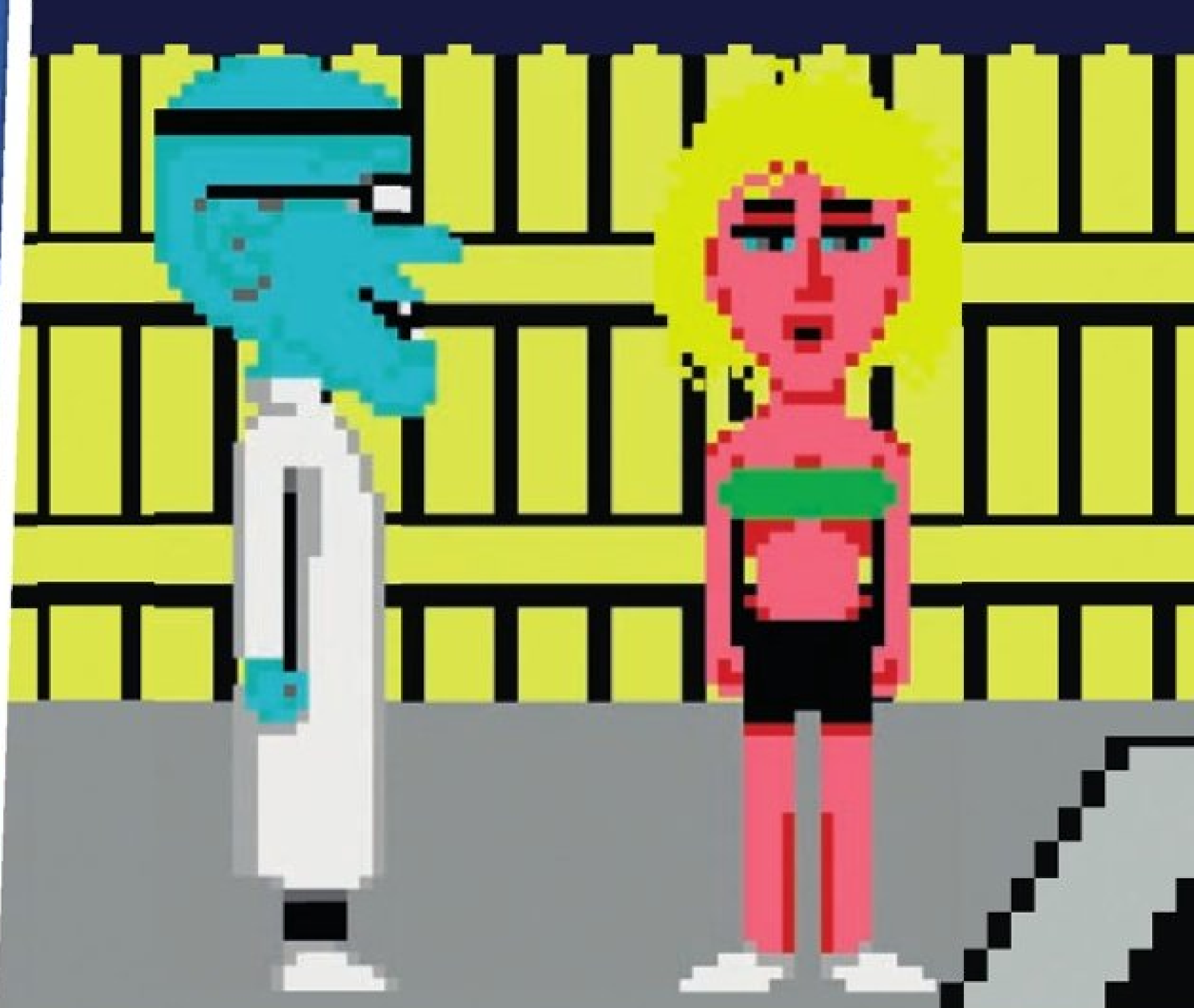
It might also surprise many fans to learn that little of *Maniac Mansion*'s design and script was actually planned from the outset. Like the best comedy, the whole development process was largely organic and based around simply seeing what worked. "Very little was written down," reveals Ron. "Gary and I just talked and laughed a lot, and out it came."

Of course, it's impossible to discuss the impact of *Maniac Mansion* without talk turning to its legendary SCUMM system – the engine and scripting language designed especially for the game and that would go on to power some classics of the genre. Intrigued to find out exactly how this seminal control interface came about, we asked Ron to explain its origins and where it fits into the *Maniac Mansion* story.

"The verb interface came about because of my frustration with playing *King's Quest*," he reveals. "I hated playing this game called 'guess the parser' – was that 'a plant', 'a weed', 'a bush'? So we wondered if it wouldn't be better to just point at something. Trying to guess the name of something wasn't the game, in our minds. Once the nouns were gone, it made perfect sense to get rid of the verbs as well and make the whole thing point-and-click. I started to program the gameplay in 6502 assembly language, but it quickly became apparent that this wasn't going to work for a game this complicated. One of the other programmers at Lucasfilm, Chip Morningstar, suggested

> **"The interface came about because of my frustration with King's Quest. I hated playing 'guess the parser'"**

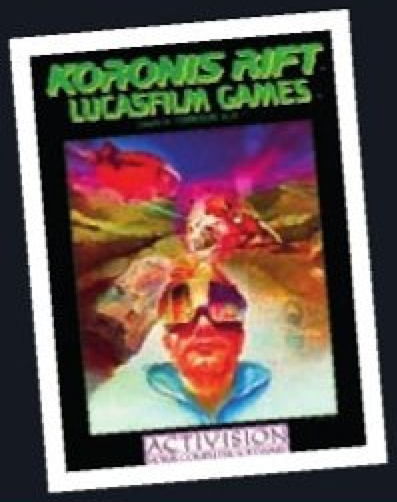




BMM (BEFORE MANIAC MANSION)

The earlier Lucasfilm games worked on by both Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick

KORONIS RIFT



Systems: Atari 8-bit, Commodore 64, Apple II, ZX Spectrum, CPC, MSX, TRS-80
Year: 1985
Using the same fractal graphics technology used in *Rescue On Fractalus!*, *Koronis Rift* sees you controlling a rover vehicle to collect, analyse, sell and make use of recovered modules from the surface of a hostile alien planet, with the ultimate goal being to use the materials to destroy an alien base. Gary worked as a graphic artist on the game, while Ron programmed the C64 version.

HABITAT



Systems: Commodore 64
Year: 1986
Habitat is widely seen as the progenitor of both the modern MMORPG and *Second Life*. A social online role-playing game, it was released in a beta state in 1986 across the online C64 service, Quantum Link. Following a two-year test run, *Habitat* reappeared on the service in 1988 as *Club Caribe*, and the technology was licensed and eventually sold to Fujitsu. Gary worked on graphics and animation while Ron created the C64 object memory manager.

I make a scripting language, which sounded like a fun idea. Chip wrote the first pass of the compiler and I focused on the runtime engine. A good chunk of the first six or nine months was just me building the SCUMM system, while Gary and I continued to work on the design and he started on the art. Seeing the SCUMM engine execute its first opcode [a simple command that the language compiles into] was a great moment. It was about two in the morning and I wasn't going to leave until this thing worked, and I cheered when it happened."

As we know, the SCUMM system proved instrumental in helping to make adventure games more user-friendly, fun and popular for a wider audience. By removing the inherent frustrations and uncertainties of previous 'guess the parser' interfaces, having an interface that combined verb prompts with an intuitive point-and-click command system allowed users to simply get on and enjoy the action without all the inconsistency and blind guessing. And the simplicity it brought to the table would help to push adventure games into new levels of accessibility, and eventually popularity too.

Though Ron and Gary don't remember exactly how long *Maniac Mansion* took to create, they told us it was somewhere between 18 and 24 months. It was finally released in the winter of 1987 for the Commodore 64 and Apple II, appearing on the PC the following year, and has since graced the ST and Amiga.

An infamous sanitised port was also released for the Nintendo Entertainment System. Notable for being the first NES title put out by Lucasfilm, the console conversion, which was published by Jaleco, was heavily censored to make it more suitable for a younger audience and adhere to Nintendo's strict family-friendly policy at the time.

Programmer Douglas Crockford volunteered to complete the job as the management in Lucasfilm's games division were "overloaded, and the project was slipping between the cracks". The sanitisation process was famously documented in his online memoir, 'The Expurgation Of *Maniac Mansion*'. In it, Crockford went into hilarious detail about the trials and tribulations of trying to interpret the NES Game Standard Policy. With Nintendo requiring that all sexually suggestive content, depictions of excessive violence and even religious references be omitted, he lists a number of instances where content had to be altered to get it past Nintendo of America's censorship people. Suffice to say, it makes for a very entertaining and witty read.

Maniac Mansion garnered favourable reviews from the gaming



» [PC] Like many classic games, *Maniac Mansion* has received an unofficial sprucing up in the fan-made *Maniac Mansion Deluxe*.

EXPERT OPINION

KEN WILLIAMS
Co-founder of Sierra On-Line

"Roberta and I never really played *Maniac Mansion*, or, at least, neither of us remembers it. We were fairly phobic about playing or studying competitors' products. I refused to hire anyone who had worked at a competitor, and really didn't want our team focused on competitors' products. Sierra always tried to consider ourselves as leaders, and wanted to forge our own path into the world. I didn't want to fall into the trap of watching what competitors did, and then releasing a 'me too' product a year later. That's a formula for disaster."



press upon its release. Popular Commodore magazine *Crash* awarded it 93%, branding it "an innovative and polished arcade adventure that shouldn't be missed", while multiformat magazine *Mean Machines*, reviewing the NES port, classed it as "a highly original and very addictive adventure that no Nintendo owner should be without".

Considering the amount of critical love for *Maniac Mansion*, coupled with the important things it did for the adventure genre, it is hard to imagine it being anything less than a hit upon its release. But as so often tends to be the way with cult classics, the popularity it saw was slow in coming.

"You know, it was well received at the time, but it wasn't a huge hit," remembers Ron. "The same is true of *Monkey Island*. People look back on these two games and their cult status today and assume that's the way it was from the beginning, but it wasn't. *Monkey Island* got good reviews, but Sierra was killing us in sales. When I left Lucasfilm, *Monkey Island* was just a game. It wasn't until several years later that I started to realise that it had taken on this cult following. That stuff takes time and it's unpredictable."

"It wasn't until years later that I realised that it had taken on this cult following. That stuff takes time and it's unpredictable"

But with the interest in point-and-click games growing throughout the Nineties, and the renamed LucasArts becoming a dominant force in the genre thanks to a steady stream of quality adventures, including the exquisite *Maniac Mansion* sequel *Day Of The Tentacle*, its first attempt became a cult hit as gamers looked to experience for themselves the origins of a genre that they held so dear.

Still discovered and returned to by gamers today, *Maniac Mansion* is an enduring piece of software that captured the spirit of its time, even if it didn't find its audience immediately.

On why his game was and continues to be such a popular getaway for so many gamers, Ron puts much of it down to his actors. "Each one spoke to someone in some way," he told us. "Players could build these 'dream teams' of characters to go into the mansion with. They could personalise the game in a way they had not seen before. I also think it's a charming game, and thank God I didn't say: 'Don't be a shit head.'"







We lift the roof off our favourite videogame buildings

BEST BUILDING SITE



Winner: Donkey Kong
Surprisingly there wasn't much competition for this category. *Hammerin' Harry* was the strongest contender, but in the end our love for *Donkey Kong*, combined with the iconic status of its first stage, sealed it. 'Fix!' you may well cry. We don't care.

BEST SKYSCRAPER



Winner: Elevator Action
Skyscrapers rarely feature in videogames. Most seem to congregate around *Die Hard* adaptations. This one, though, could be the first. We use the word 'could' as we're not sure it isn't just a fairly tall office block… although, isn't that basically what a skyscraper is?

BEST MANSION (RUNNER-UP)



Winner: Resident Evil
Well, the obvious winner had to be *Maniac Mansion*, but we felt an honourable mention was deserved for *Resident Evil*. It's a menacing locale with loads of areas to explore and zombie squatters, and the GameCube remake can still make us mess ourselves.

BEST ARCADE



Winner: Shenmue
There's a small minority of people who never finished *Shenmue*, not due to it being half-finished but because of reaching the arcade situated on the main street in Dobuita and forgetting all about revenge and the Phoenix Mirror. *Space Harrier* is far more important.

BEST SCHOOL



Winner: Skool Daze
Capturing so accurately the drudge and monotony of school life but using it to such great effect as to create a brilliant computer game, *Skool Daze* is the clear winner in this category. We did mark it down a few points for poor spelling, though.

BEST PUB



Winner: Tapper
Though we do question the common sense of the manager of a busy watering hole with numerous bars all manned by a single member of staff, in terms of lightning service few establishments can match the speed of this one. Watch out for the ones that only sell root beer, though.

BEST CASTLE

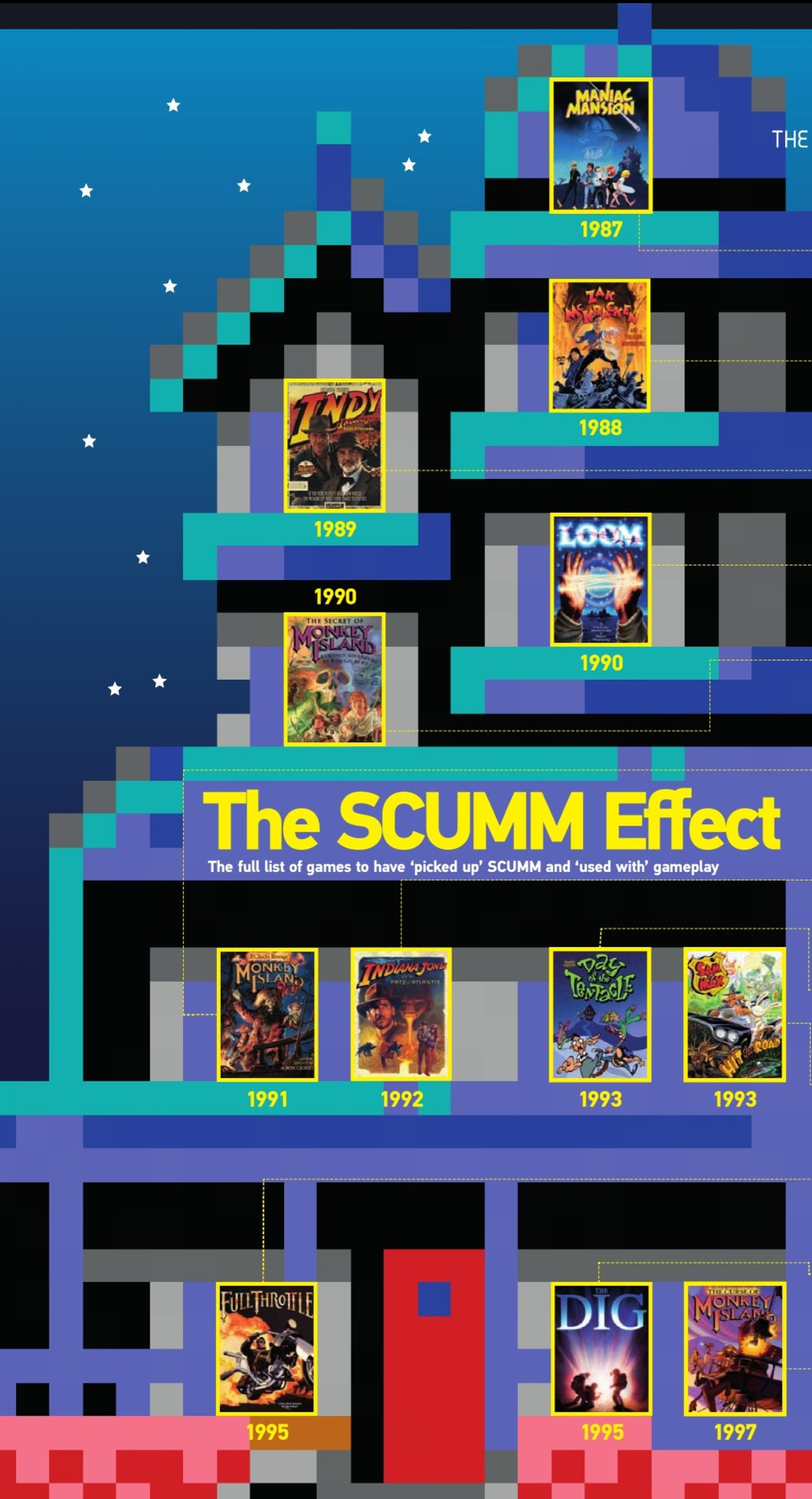


Winner: Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night
It wasn't the first time we'd explored Dracula's castle, but it had never felt so alive – or undead – as here. The kicker came when you finished the game, only to find the castle had inverted, giving you a whole new layout to explore.

Special thanks to Ron Gilbert and Gary Winnick for their precious time and Mat Allen for scanning the lovely cover art.

The SCUMM Effect

The full list of games to have 'picked up' SCUMM and 'used with' gameplay



MANIAC MANSION
The game that started it all, hence the engine's name standing for 'Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*'. We could elaborate, but we've just written that bloody great feature on it.

ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS
Maniac Mansion was followed by the brilliant *Zak McKracken*. With a similar art style, it saw a jetsetting tabloid journalist trying to save the human race from space aliens.

INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE: THE GRAPHIC ADVENTURE
SCUMM made its movie licence debut with this tie-in with the last good *Indy* film. One of the best adventure film franchises coupled with the best adventure engine was a recipe for magic.

LOOM
Loom is unlike any other SCUMM adventure game. It eschews the traditional verb-object interface for one that sees you casting spells, known as 'drafts' in the game, to manipulate objects instead.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND
The first in the *Monkey Island* series sees Guybrush Threepwood earn his pirate stripes. Designed by Ron Gilbert, Tim Schafer and Dave Grossman, it remains one of the most popular SCUMM titles of all.

MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE
LucasArts then followed up with this superb *Monkey Island* sequel the next year. It had a darker tone than the original and was also the first SCUMM title to include a difficulty level.

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS
Widely regarded as one of the best LucasArts adventure games, *Fate Of Atlantis* was a resplendent sequel with a completely original story, therefore making it a must-play for *Indy* fans.

MANIAC MANSION: DAY OF THE TENTACLE
The superb sequels continued with *Day Of The Tentacle*, a follow-up to *Maniac Mansion*. Set five years after the first, it sees the player trying to thwart Purple Tentacle's plans to take over the world.

SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD
Multiple characters kind of made a return in *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. A popular adventure series that is still going strong today through Telltale Games, it was the first new SCUMM game to feature full voice acting.

FULL THROTTLE
The first solo game from Tim Schafer was a belter. Termed a 'heavy metal adventure', *Full Throttle* followed a framed fugitive, revolving around biker gangs and primed with *Star Wars* references.

THE DIG
Based on an idea by Steven Spielberg, *The Dig* told the tale of an expedition to save Earth from an errant asteroid. With zero LucasArts humour, it's the most sombre of all the SCUMM games.

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND
After a lengthy break, *Monkey Island* returned to a rapturous PC market. Like *Full Throttle*, it adopted the 'verb coin' revision of the SCUMM interface as well as an entirely new cartoon art style.

Mapped!



#04. Maniac Mansion

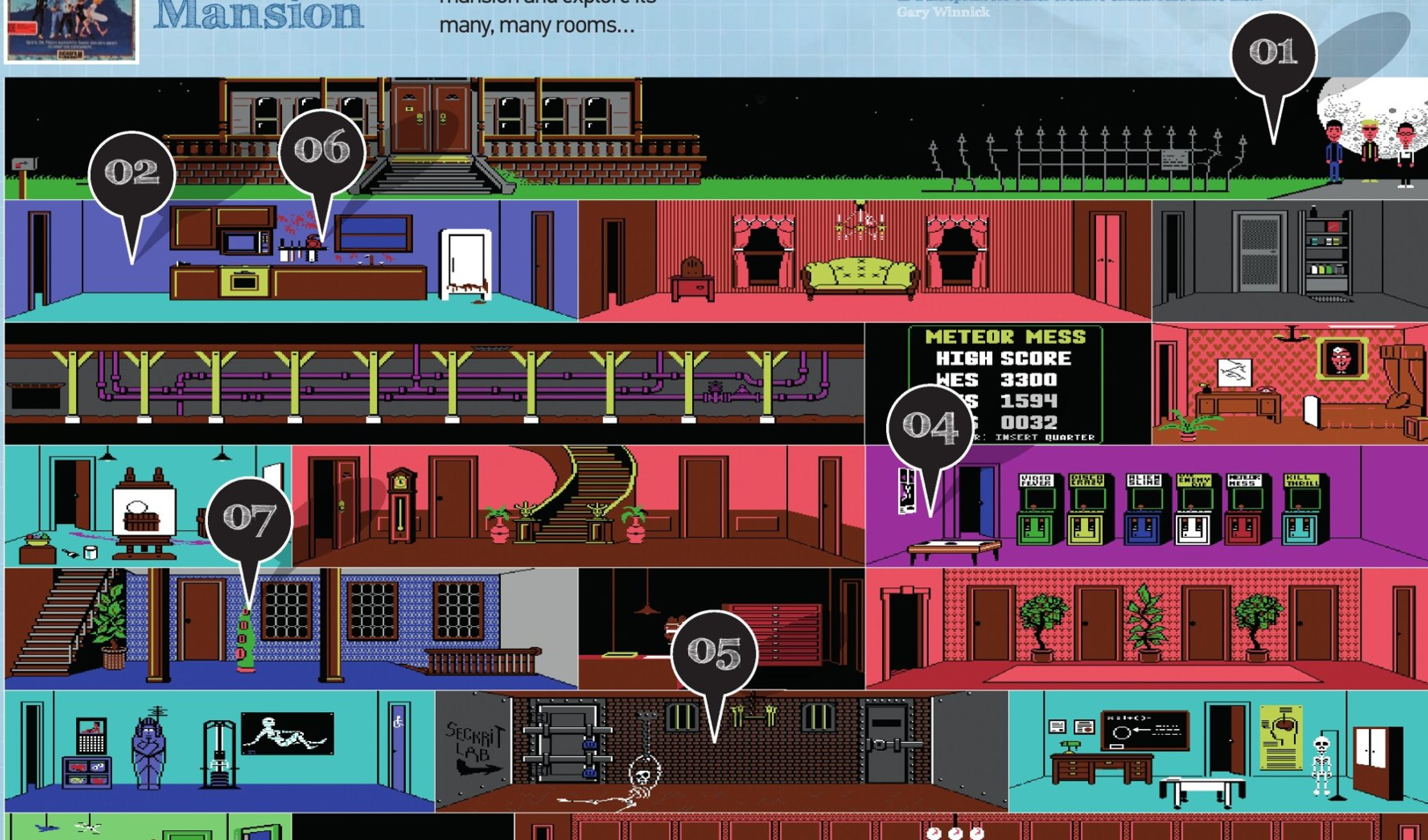
We delve inside the creepy insides of the Edison family mansion and explore its many, many rooms…

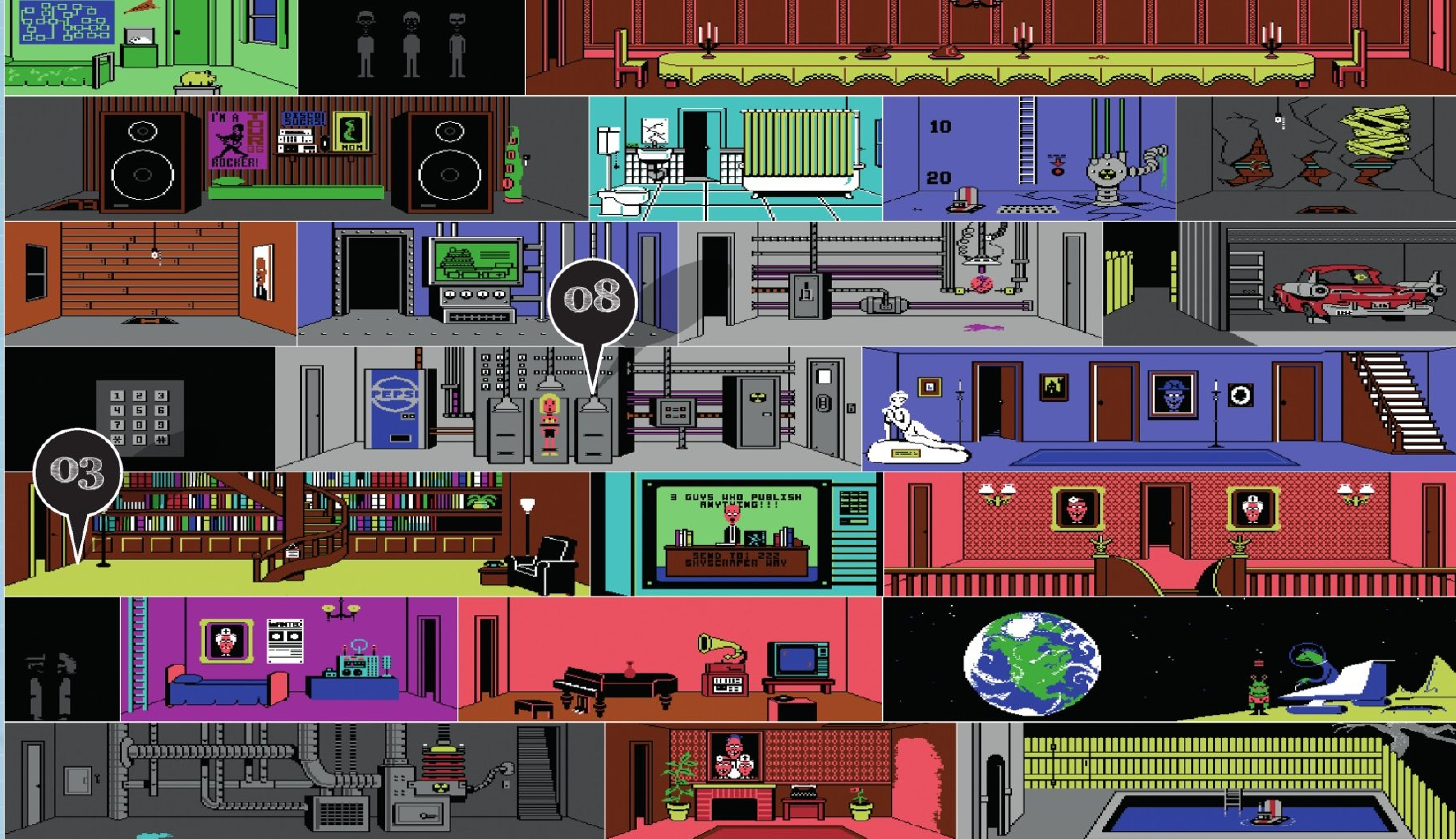
What Maniac Mansion means to me



"*Maniac* was the initial opportunity given to us to move from the service side into the realm of game designers, and as such holds a special place in my heart. We were pretty much given carte blanche to be as creative and wacky as we wanted and rose to the occasion. It was also probably some of the most fun I've had in my career and proved we could make a successful product from our otherwise demented imaginations. And on many levels the experience served as a blueprint for other creative endeavours since then."

Gary Winnick





Legend:

01 Driveway Your search begins outside, thus your first order of business is to work out how to get in. The solution is fairly simple, but be sure to leave someone stood by the post box.

02 Kitchen The kitchen is where most gamers will encounter their first Edison family member. Nurse Edna is by the fridge and will give chase if she spots you. Leg it outside to escape her.

03 Library This room was loosely based on the library of the Skywalker Ranch. Some speculate that the 'out of order' staircase was originally going to lead somewhere, but Ron has debunked this myth.

04 Games room The games room is full of arcade games, and if you can find a quarter you can give *Meteor Mess* a whirl. Be sure to jot down the high score, as it's the combination to the laboratory door.

05 Dungeon Get caught by the Edisons and this is where you end up. To escape, either have a second character enter the mansion to free their pals, or simply find the loose brick, just like in the movies.

06 Chainsaw A notorious red herring is the chainsaw, located in the kitchen. Clicking on the possible weapon tells you that it is out of gas. Players wasted many hours scouring the mansion for fuel.

07 Odd lodgers Quirkier inhabitants include two tentacles. Green is quite pleasant, with designs on being a rock star; purple is evil incarnate, his wickedness coming to the fore in *Day Of The Tentacle*.

08 Secret lab This is where Dr Edison is keeping Sandy, so your mission is to find a way to get inside. Once you do, free the cheerleader and finally put a stop to that malevolent meteorite.

Special thanks to Benjamin Wimmer for allowing us to use his map. Visit his website at **www.c64screenshots.com**.

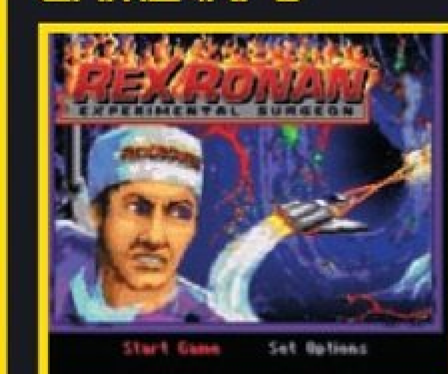
» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

REX RONAN: EXPERIMENTAL SURGEON



» [SNES] Rex decides to make his patient's mouth nice a sparkly before tackling the blood clot in his heart.

GAME INFO



- » **SYSTEM:** SNES
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PUBLISHER:** RAYA SYSTEMS
- » **GENRE:** ACTION



» [SNES] This is about as complex as the level design in Rex Ronan gets. We wouldn't be surprised if they'd been planned out on the back of cigarette packet. Too crass? Sorry.

If you ever needed evidence that weighty subjects such as alcohol abuse or the risks of laser eye surgery should be avoided by games, then *Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon* – which attempts to explain to kids the dangers of cigarette smoking – can be seen as a smoking gun, if you excuse the pun.

Released for the SNES, *Rex Ronan* was produced by Raya Systems, a little-known publisher whose previous releases included *Captain Novalin*, a game about a superhero with type 1 diabetes. A bit of a semi-sequel, *Ronan* sees you assume the role of a gifted young surgeon who decides to save the life of a successful cigarette salesman who's left hanging in the balance as a result of him puffing what he preaches.

To save him, Rex, who is also clearly some kind of whizz inventor too, has developed a wonderful machine that can shrink things to the size of a mere molecule, and his plan is to use the machine to enter the man's body (*Innerspace*-style) and eradicate the hazardous garbage left inside as a result of years and years of cigarette smog.

Trying to thwart this unorthodox operation, though, is the dastardly cigarette company that the man used to work for. They don't want its ex-employee to pull through, for fear that if he does then he may go to the press and spill the shocking beans that smoking is dangerous. Somehow, and this somehow is never explained, the tobacco company has managed to infect the salesman's body with an army of tiny robots and spaceships that have been specially programmed to kill Rex and thus stop him from carrying out his mission. It's all a bit silly.

Fortunately, Rex knows some very freaky-looking kung fu (very freaky) and is armed with a bizarre disease-cleansing gun that, quite handily, also doubles up as an effective weapon to take down the enemy robots.

With each level of *Rex Ronan* set in a different part of the body, this is where any minutia of entertainment you're likely to have will be found.

With time clearly not of the essence for Rex, the opening level is set inside a mouth and sees him moonlighting as an experimental dental hygienist as he tries to jet-wash plaque and bacteria from discoloured teeth and puffy gums. Surely yellow teeth and halitosis would be the least of his patient's worries?

Anyway, after this, Rex hops inside his miniaturised spaceship and it's then that the gameplay momentarily switches into a bizarre tunnel-shooter where Rex has to blast away more diseased rubbish while travelling through his patient's trachea. Later levels then see Rex removing phlegm from his patient's lungs, blood clots in the coronary artery of his heart, and finally curing the smoking addiction that has a vice like hold over his brain.

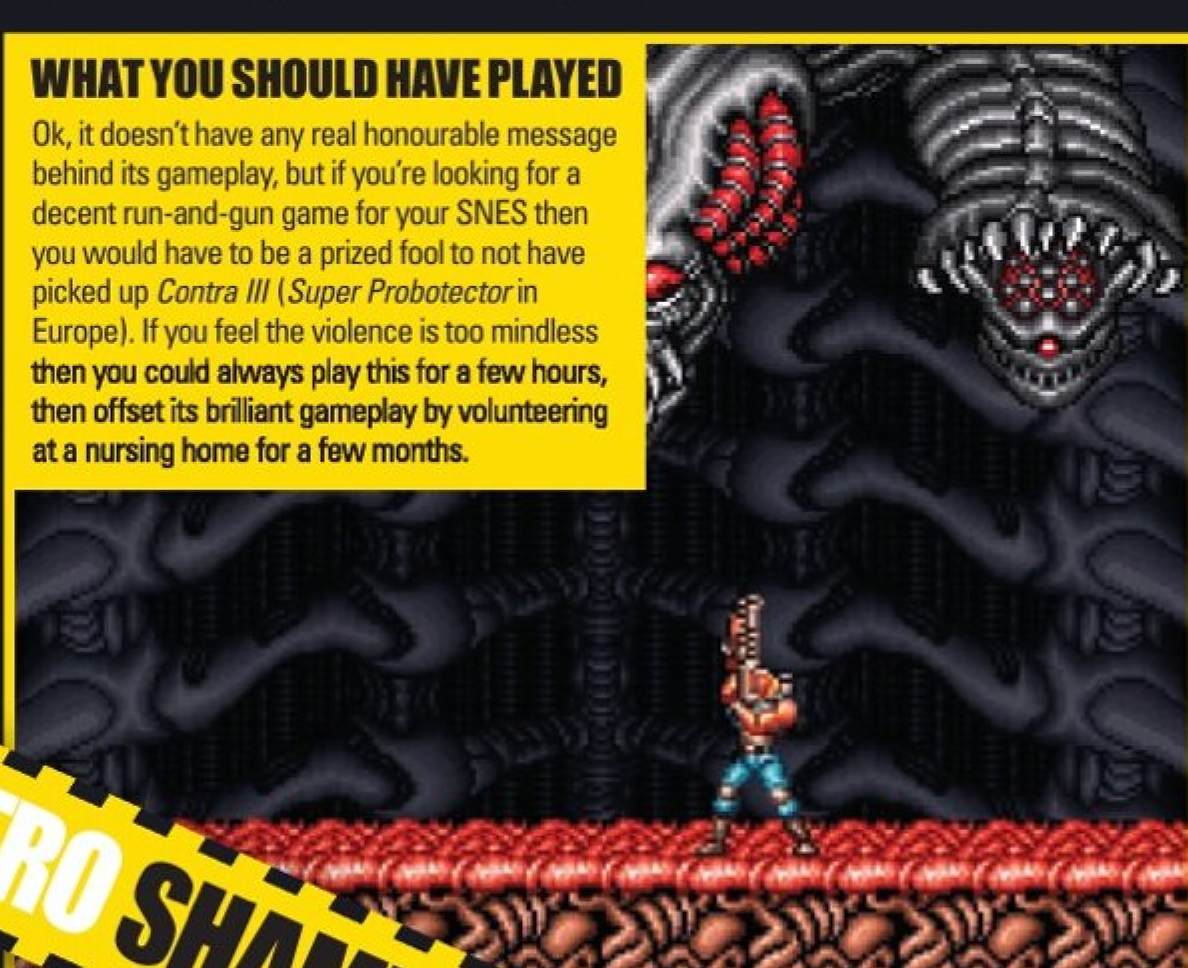
If you think the concept and story behind *Rex Ronan* sound bad though, just wait until you play the game.

Odd, lazily designed levels where you can jump through ledges, which therefore makes having ledges somewhat pointless; clunky controls and animation; a pathetic length of little over an hour; ropey and ineffective melee combat; and weapons upgrades that are less affective than your standard shot are just some of the many issues we found inside *Rex Ronan*… or we should say inside the cigarette salesman.

An admirable idea without question, but it's a noble message lost inside a terrible game with a ridiculous name and laughable story.

WHAT YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED

Ok, it doesn't have any real honourable message behind its gameplay, but if you're looking for a decent run-and-gun game for your SNES then you would have to be a prized fool to not have picked up *Contra III* (*Super Probotector* in Europe). If you feel the violence is too mindless **then you could always play this for a few hours, then offset its brilliant gameplay by volunteering at a nursing home for a few months.**



» THE POINTLESS PARTS



QUIZ MACHINES

Apparently, located inside the human body are these machines which ask you true or false questions.



TUNNEL VISION

Permeating the action are the *S.T.U.N. Runner*-style tunnel sections. They're tedious, so, nothing like *S.T.U.N. Runner.*



REX RONAN

The developers clearly went to great pains to make Rex Ronan look as goofy as possible, he wears a purple catsuit.


CH



APTER And VERSUS

It's all well and good for Capcom to come up with a bunch of characters and make them fight, but things get even more interesting when the firm opens up the doors to new challengers from not just other games, but entirely different media. Fireballs get bigger, supers get even more super... generally speaking, anyone that suffers from epilepsy should stay the hell away, because if the screen isn't a perpetual explosion of colour, somebody is doing something wrong. We delve into the archives to find out how the crossover phenomenon began for Capcom and what makes it so popular...

Crossovers are gaming's greatest contradiction. As much as it makes no thematic sense to have characters from all manner of different fictions, universes, timelines and franchises meet, team up and duke it out, letting gamers settle age-old playground disputes or forge impossible alliances makes *perfect* sense, both from the player's perspective and from a business standpoint. It's a chance to double a game's audience in a single stroke, games like *Marvel Vs. Capcom* uniting avid beat-'em-up fans with true believers who may not be that into gaming, all the while delighting fans with a love of both sides of the crossover. And as silly as things can get when any and all challengers are free to sign up, that's the beauty of the crossover – when you've already got a cast that spans different worlds and media, it's pretty hard for anyone to call foul and say you've gone too far.

While the idea of bringing together multiple properties for a single game had been prevalent in Japanese games since the Famicom era, Capcom's crossover beginnings can be traced back to an early deal with Marvel. Hot on the heels of Konami's popular scrolling beat-'em-up, Capcom instead decided to employ its proven fighting game prowess to find out which of the X-Men would come out on top should the bunch of them put loyalties to one side in order to get into a massive ruck. *X-Men: Children Of The Atom* might have used the same basic commands as *Street Fighter* before it, but the over-the-top special and super moves of its superhuman cast made the larger-than-life martial arts of Ryu and friends seem positively tame by comparison. Impressive screen-filling attacks meant the spectacle lit up many an arcade and proved hugely popular, soon spawning a sequel that brought even more familiar faces onto the scene. *Marvel Super Heroes* followed the same template but paved the way for a far more varied roster, allowing the likes of Captain America, Spider-Man and the Hulk to join the fray.

At this point, someone at Capcom clearly noticed that its own fighters were being shown up by the explosive antics of these super-powered

upstarts. But why should Marvel's characters have all the fun of hundred-hit combos, aerial raves and pyrotechnic special attacks? With the *Street Fighter Alpha* series sticking to the franchise's comparatively subdued one-on-ones, Capcom was left little choice but to prove its own characters could do things just as ridiculous as their Marvel counterparts in the only way it could – by pitting the fighters from both sides of the fence against one another on the same terms. And with this one bold move, Capcom unwittingly took its first steps into a whole new gaming world and one which would redefine what a fighting game could and should be for an entire generation.

For its first foray into the fantastical world of the crossover, Capcom wisely scaled back the roster on both sides. A mere eight characters per side faced off in 1996's *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*, and while powering up its warriors to be on a par with the flashy mutants was a big deal, it was nothing compared to the innovations the game would bring on a fundamental level. Players could choose a pair of characters with which to go into battle and while the ability to select multiple characters for a fight was nothing new, the ability to switch between them at will certainly was. This ingenious mechanic did away with the usual three-round formula common to many fighters, instead awarding a victory to the last team standing. Switching in a partner saw them come flying in and entering with a taunt, leaving them vulnerable to attacks for a moment, though, allies could also safely be introduced by burning a little super meter to either have them enter with a defensive counter or a powerful Variable Combination. SNK's *Kizuna Encounter* would employ a similar tag mechanic that same year but Capcom's forward-thinking take on the mechanic proved far more exciting and versatile, hence why we still see a very similar system used in tag team fighters to this day.

With Ryu now throwing beams where once he tossed out blobs of energy, Ken producing walls of flame out of thin air and fans lapping up this new slant on the usually restrained cast, it was clear that in the right environment, even the most mild-mannered combatant could let his or her hair down, cut loose and nuke entire screens with special moves. Clearly growing in confidence, Capcom's next step was to up the ante on the Marvel side just as it had done shortly before the crossover chaos began. While its own roster changed little for *Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter*, the added freedom on the Marvel side allowed Capcom to reach a little further into comics to call out some even more ridiculous characters. It would also introduce another tag staple in the assist, allowing partners to be briefly called in for an attack rather than switch in permanently, and this in itself was something of a game-changer.

It's probably worth noting at this point that arcade success hadn't blinded Capcom to the potential in bringing these explosive beat-'em-ups to the home market as well. *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter*'s innovative tag team mechanic might have been great news for arcade players but it proved impossible to port to the significantly less powerful PlayStation, RAM constraints meaning that as well as lopping out animation frames, this core element had to be cut entirely. In its place, Crossover mode would cheat the system and allow some semblance of tag team play by using the opponent's chosen character as your tag partner and vice versa. This caveat was present in each subsequent crossover fighter too, but there was another option. By using a RAM expansion pack (often bundled with the game), the Saturn versions of each title were able to accurately replicate their arcade counterparts in virtually every respect, making them the definitive home versions. Well, until the Dreamcast rolled into town anyway, but that would prove to be the start of a whole new chapter in Versus history.

Ready to take things to the next level, Capcom decided just before the millennium that the time was right to turn this fight into an open invite affair. Free from the trappings of purely using the *Street Fighter* brand, *Marvel Vs. Capcom: Clash Of Super Heroes* was a turning point for the crossover, the moment where it stopped being a way of deciding the outcome of fictional showdowns and became a general celebration of the work of two huge companies. To this end, fighters were drafted in from the huge portfolios of both sides, a decent playable roster bolstered by palette swaps and, more importantly, the addition of non-playable

"Why should Marvel's characters have all the fun of hundred-hit combos, aerial raves and pyrotechnic special attacks?"







» [PS2] Many deem *Capcom Vs. SNK 2* as the definitive 'serious' crossover fighter, with a refined Ratio system and improved Groove section topping those of the original.







» [Saturn] *X-Men Vs. Street Fighter* was the first game to let players switch between fighters mid-battle.





support characters. These strikers meant that the game could easily represent and celebrate far more franchises than a twenty-man roster ever could; familiar (and not-so-familiar) support characters delighting fans of both sides with cameos and unique attacks to help change the flow of battle.

This sense of celebration was taken to a whole new level by 2000's direct sequel, *Marvel Vs. Capcom 2: New Age Of Heroes*. The first and only game in the series to use Sega's NAOMI arcade board, this additional processing power allowed *MVC2* to blow its predecessors out of the water both in terms of production values and content. Featuring a still-unprecedented 56 playable fighters and flashy 3D backdrops, this set a new benchmark for both crossover fighters and crossovers in general, and the game is still celebrated as one of the greatest fighting games of all time. Still, all that extra goodness did come at a price – balancing proved nigh impossible (only a tiny percentage of the roster sees play at tournament level) and it also meant that character-specific endings had to be scrapped. Still, with so many characters, cuts should have been expected and the subsequent freedom to select millions of team permutations was worth the few sacrifices that had to be made.

Its long-standing beef with Marvel settled in the greatest crossover fighter to date, Capcom quickly turned its attention to direct competitor SNK and with the *Street Fighter* cast going head to head with their *King Of Fighters* counterparts, and things had to be taken a little more seriously. Scaling the silliness levels right back, *Capcom Vs. SNK* introduced a host of intriguing and technical new features in lieu of full-screen super moves and pyrotechnic displays. The Ratio system replaced on-the-fly tagging, allowing teams of up to four characters to be selected based on the strength of each fighter – four Ratio points to spend on a team meant that players had to tactically choose whether to select a greater number of weaker characters or put all of their proverbial eggs into one equally proverbial basket with one powerful fighter. It also saw the removal of a unified fighting system across all characters, instead affording players the ability to choose their preferred option or Groove from an *Alpha*-style super bar mechanic from the Capcom side or a *KOF*-esque equivalent from SNK. Again, this crossover was well received, though, once again it wasn't until the sequel that it really found its legs.

Capcom Vs. SNK 2 followed a year later, every aspect of the original turned up to 11 to make this the best 'serious' crossover fighter there has ever been. A refined Ratio system let players balance their chosen fighters themselves, while huge improvements to the Groove selection process brought in four new options from across both Capcom and SNK's portfolios – everything from



Anything You Can Do…

The Mugen community will try to do better

SUPER MARVEL VS. CAPCOM: ETERNITY OF HEROES

With its latest release clocking in at over 100 playable characters and a wealth of related stages and music, *SMVC* is probably the best Mugen crossover project we've seen so far. With a sizeable team contributing elements, the project has grown at an astonishing rate, and work on it continues to this day – the Infinity team has done itself proud.

STREET FIGHTER SNK

Less a crossover and more an alternate take on the classic fighting franchise, *Street Fighter SNK* takes the sprites that have appeared in SNK's crossover games and adds in some new fighters done up in the same style. The roster isn't all that big at the moment, but still, it's an interesting project and one that seems to play pretty well too.

DC VS. MARVEL

The two comic giants collide in this, probably the crossover Mugen release that most original work has gone into out of all the ones we checked out. A lot of characters are cleverly repurposed versions of older sprites but still, it's a great idea and one that is only in its early stages. Expect good things once the team behind it takes it to the next level.



Samurai Shodown's Rage system to *Street Fighter III*'s risk/reward Parry was represented here, unique abilities in each leading to an incredible boost to team variety and potential. The shift from a four-button setup to a six-button scheme also helped add depth to the combat, leading many to hail this as Capcom's crowning achievement of recent years.

With Capcom clearly having all the fun, SNK later decided it would give this whole crossover thing a shot itself and thus *SNK Vs. Capcom Chaos* was born. While it attracted some attention for its unified art style (whereas Capcom's games were sometimes seen as lazy for their constant repurposing of old assets), a return to one-on-one fights and simple systems was seen by many as a step backwards. SNK's work on NeoGeo Pocket title *SNK Vs. Capcom* garnered the firm far more praise and sure enough, the portable title was a technical marvel – cramming 26 fighters onto that tiny cart can have been no mean feat and it holds the honour of being the largest NGPC game in terms of memory used. Oh, and it played pretty well too.

After years of hoaxes, petitions, wishlists and crossed fingers, Capcom finally returned to the crossover fighting scene several years ago, though, not in a manner that anyone expected. Teaming up this time not with a comic book superpower or long-term fighting rival but a relatively obscure (on this side of the pond, at least) Japanese animation firm. *Tatsunoko Vs. Capcom*, while not quite in the same league as the spectacular highs and technical complexity of *MVC*, it proved an entertaining brawler, bringing together a varied cast from the works of both companies involved. Modern hardware and damage levels measured in the millions made sure that it had silliness in spades, though, Capcom's follow-up proved far more enjoyable. Most of us had written it off earlier this year, but Capcom made dreams come true with *Marvel Vs. Capcom 3*, getting all the great stuff from the second game and taking it to the nth degree for the most ridiculous crossover yet, one that seems designed to make eyes bleed and to defy convention by drafting in the most leftfield characters the team can think of to sit alongside the likes of Ryu and Iron Man.

But while today's more powerful hardware might make for more explosive encounters than ever before, it's amazing how little the crossover genre has actually changed. Sure, it's evolved – successes and mistakes from previous games have clearly been noted in making both *TVC* and *MVC3* – but a lot of the fundamental mechanics are relatively unchanged from when they were introduced over a decade ago. It's for this reason that both these aging fighters still hold up pretty well and the modern games feel instantly familiar – aside from the 21st century makeover, there's little here to differentiate between games some fifteen years apart. Kudos to Capcom, then, for getting it all so very, very right in the first place.

» [PS3] *Ultimate Marvel Vs. Capcom 3* will be out later this year and features 12 new heroes, including Marvel's Ghost Rider and Capcom's Strider Hiryu.



" With Capcom clearly having all the fun, SNK later decided it would give this whole crossover thing a shot itself "

Double-Crossed

IT'S NOT JUST FIGHTERS THAT GET THE CROSSOVER TREATMENT...



IT WAS ON THE CARDS

Capcom's feud with SNK wasn't settled exclusively through fisticuffs. NeoGeo Pocket gem *Cardfighters Clash* saw the two companies pitted against one another through the medium of a collectible card game, and a surprisingly robust one at that. Trying to round up all the game's character cards might not have dragged the kids away from trying to catch 'em all but, hey, can't say they didn't try, right?

CAPCOM VS.... CAPCOM?

Tired of wailing on rival studios and crazy characters from outside its own walls, Capcom even managed to pick a fight with itself once. *Capcom Fighting Jam* brought together loads of different Capcom characters for an internal bout but it lacked the magic of other crossovers. At least it was released, though – the same can't be said for cancelled 3D crossover *Capcom Fighting All-Stars*.





KNOW YOUR ROLE

Long before the recently announced duo of *Street Fighter/Tekken* crossovers, *Namco X Capcom* had representatives of both sides unite and face off in an over-complicated strategy RPG. The game only ever came out in Japan and in all honesty, it was hardly the best example of the genre – especially compared to *Super Robot Wars*, itself a crossover of many of Japan's popular mech franchises.

FIRE THE CANNONS

Pulling loads of its own characters might not have worked for Capcom with *Fighting Jam*, but for arcade shooter *Cannon Spike* it worked out better. Well, a bit better. Dropping Mega Man, Charlie and B B Hood into this alien scenario gave this Dreamcast release novelty value. Vega was an enemy, but we're not sure the localisation team recognised him – he goes under his Japanese name of Balrog.





CROSS YOUR HEART

Idea Factory's recent RPG *Cross Edge* has to go down as one of the most ambitious of all time, trying to unite characters from eight different franchises under a common banner, while at the same time introducing its own original characters. On the Capcom side, it's all about *Darkstalkers* – Morrigan is the first party member recruited in the game while several other *Darkstalkers* faces pop up during the story too.

Cross Generation Of Heroes

NO, WE DIDN'T REALISE THAT THERE WERE QUITE THIS MANY PLAYABLE CHARACTERS EITHER...



>> AKARI
>> AKUMA
>> ALEX
>> AMATERASU



>> AMINGO
>> ANAKARIS
>> ARTHUR
>> ATHENA
>> B B HOOD
>> BALROG
>> BATSU
>> BENIMARU
>> BLACKHEART
>> BLANKA
>> C VIPER
>> CABLE
>> CAMMY
>> CAPTAIN AMERICA
>> CAPTAIN COMMANDO
>> CASSHAN
>> CHANG
>> CHARLIE
>> CHOI
>> CHRIS REDFIELD
>> CHUN-LI
>> COLOSSUS
>> CYCLOPS
>> DAN
>> DANTE
>> DEADPOOL
>> DEMITRI
>> DHALSIM
>> DOCTOR DOOM
>> DORMAMMU
>> DORONJO
>> E HONDA
>> EAGLE
>> EARTHQUAKE
>> EVIL RYU
>> FELICIA
>> FRANK WEST
>> GAMBIT
>> GEESE HOWARD

Cross Generation Of Heroes





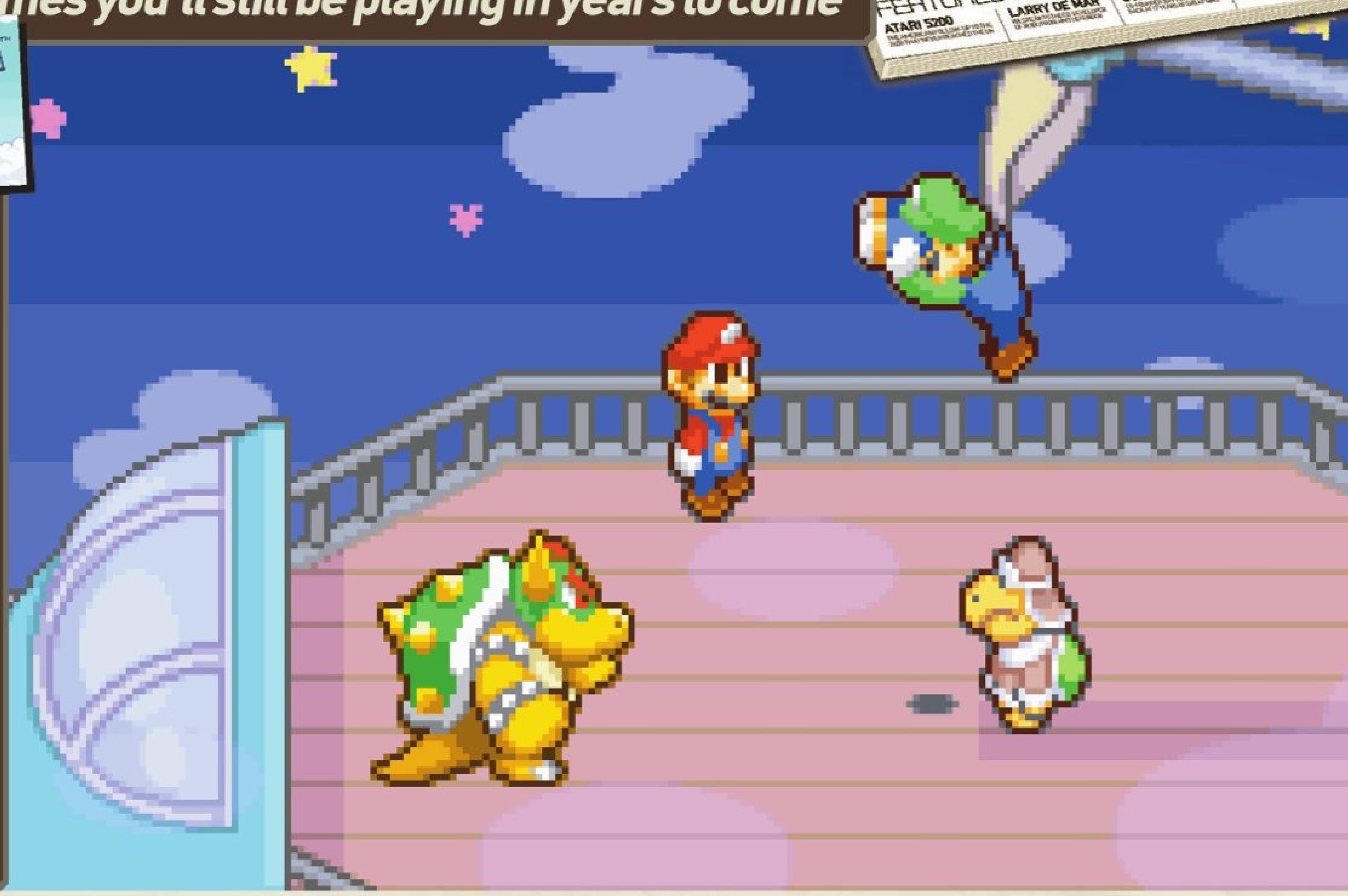
>> ROGUE
>> ROLENTO
>> ROLL
>> RUBY HEART
>> RUGAL
>> RYO
>> RYU
>> SABRETOOTH
>> SAGAT
>> SAKI
>> SAKURA
>> SHUMA-GORATH
>> SENTINEL
>> SERVBOT
>> SHE-HULK
>> SHIKI
>> SHIN AKUMA
>> SILVER SAMURAI
>> SOKI
>> SONSON
>> SPENCER
>> SPIDER-MAN
>> SPIRAL
>> STORM
>> STRIDER HIRYU
>> SUPER-SKRULL
>> TASKMASTER
>> TEKKAMAN
>> TEKKAMAN BLADE
>> TERRY BOGARD
>> TESSA
>> THANOS
>> THOR
>> TODOH
>> TRISH
>> TRON BONNE
>> ULTIMATE RUGAL
>> US AGENT
>> VEGA
>> VENOM
>> VICE
>> VIEWTIFUL JOE
>> WAR MACHINE
>> WESKER
>> WOLVERINE
>> X-23
>> YAMAZAKI
>> YATTERMAN-1
>> YATTERMAN-2
>> YUN
>> YURI
>> ZANGIEF
>> ZERO

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come







INFO

- **Featured System:** Game Boy Advance
- **Year Released:** 2003
- **Publisher:** Nintendo
- **Developer:** AlphaDream
- **Key People:** Hiroyuki Kubota, Yasuhiro Ohtsuka; Nate Bihldorff, Bill Trinen (translation)

GO DEEPER

- **The translation retains almost all of the jokes in the original Japanese script. It's very rare that material has been scrapped.**
- ***Superstar Saga*'s composer, Yoko Shimomura, is renowned for her work on the *Kingdom Hearts* series.**

19. MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA

Mario's ventures in the RPG space took a handheld turn, bringing inspiration from the Paper Mario series and enchanting fans with its sharp, comic script

THE BACKGROUND

Since the release of *Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars* in 1996, Nintendo had been experimenting with taking the Mario character and putting him against an RPG backdrop. Even then, the template was set for bringing the essence of *Mario* platforming into a more traditional RPG-style structure – members of AlphaDream, too, once worked at Square on the SNES title. *Superstar Saga* would build on that formula, while also lifting some inspiration from another by-product of *Seven Stars*, the acclaimed *Paper Mario* series.

"The most important traits of the gameplay, namely the lighthearted combination of humour and traditional RPG as well as the action-command system, were pioneered in *Super Mario RPG*, and every *Mario & Luigi* game since has refined and improved them," Nintendo's Nate Bihldorff told *Game Informer* in 2009. Yet the element that consistently drew praise for *Superstar Saga* would be the script, the result of AlphaDream being given relatively free rein with the *Mario* licence. This would then be meticulously translated by Nintendo Treehouse, the publisher's in-house localisation team. Fitting every joke into the game's small caption boxes and retaining their humour was difficult, certainly, but the end product was one of the most cheerfully bizarre Nintendo games in years.

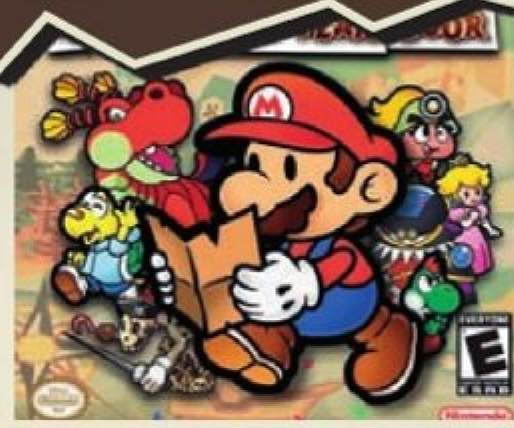
THE GAME

"And this battle shall be the delicious mustard on that bread! The mustard of your doom!" This intentionally lame culinary metaphor, spouted by *Superstar Saga* antagonist Fawful, gained deserved internet traction upon the game's release for its clear reference to the 'You spoony bard!'-esque moments of dodgy

Things of note



Bowser in charge
The third game, *Bowser's Inside Story*, lets players take on the role of the villain as well as the two brothers. It's on a par with *Superstar Saga* in terms of script.



Mario's RPG legacy
Along with the handheld games, *Paper Mario* and the original *Super Mario RPG* are among the most championed entries in their competitive genre.



Nods and homages
Superstar Saga gloriously pays tribute to *Mario*'s past adventures, whether in its dialogue or subtle visual touches. These references are usually easy to spot.



Plumber team-up
Another great feature of the combat is the brothers' combo moves, QTE-driven sequences that once again keep these bits from descending into a button-mashing grindfest.



AlphaDreaming
Although AlphaDream has mostly focused on *Mario & Luigi*, its most notable other title was *Tomato Adventure*, released in Japan only and garnering a cult following.



» [GBA] The brothers even have a 'Stache' statistic. Nothing is free from the game's sense of humour.



» [GBA] *Mario & Luigi* remains true to the positive reputation of *Super Mario RPG*.



What the press thought

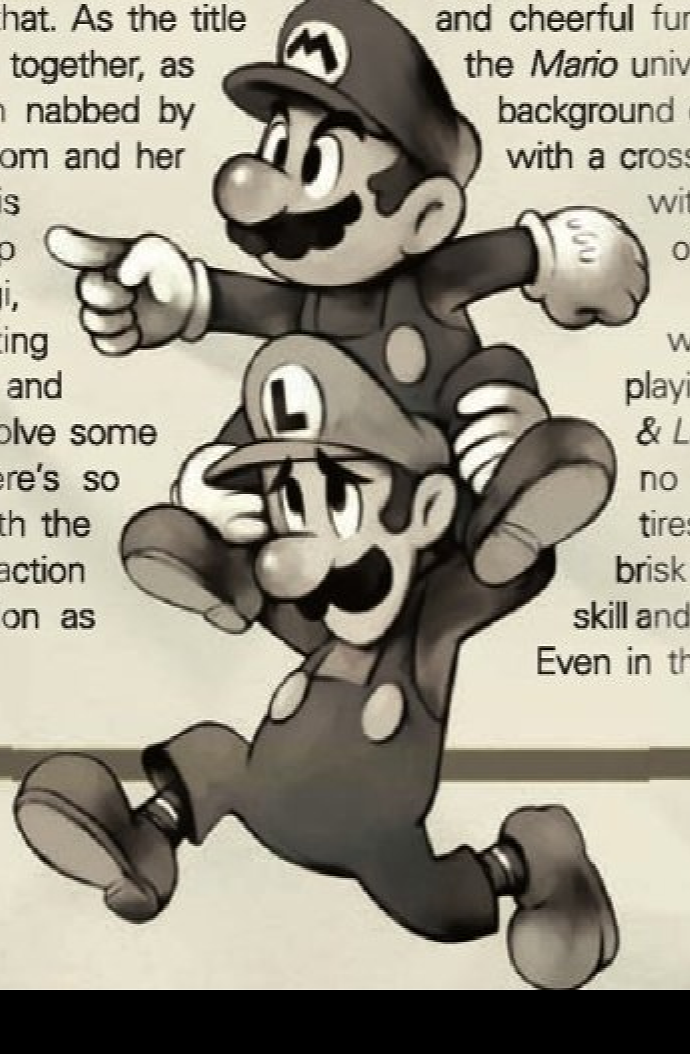


games™
Score: 9/10
"It may not lean enough in either direction for hardcore platform or RPG fanatics to find everything they're looking for, but as far as genre-crossing titles go, they don't come much more enjoyable than this."

GamePro
Score: 4/5
"A collection of mighty Mushroom moments, if not a big fungal picture."

translations past. It sums up a lot of this 2003 GBA title's appeal: capturing the NES and SNES era through the lens of an up-to-date RPG.

Fundamentally, *Mario & Luigi* translates the rhythm of the *Mario* series' relatively simple platforming into the turn-based combat system, meaning that battles are fought with well-timed button presses, rather than slowly chosen from a list of attacks. Right away, the game taps in to what we love about regular *Mario* titles, then layers its own meticulous and addictive touches on top of that. As the title implies, the brothers are working together, as Princess Peach's voice has been nabbed by Cackletta of the Beanbean Kingdom and her aforementioned minion Fawful. This odd premise means you end up controlling both Mario and Luigi, and during the exploration separating battles you swap between them and their special abilities in order to solve some nifty environmental puzzles. There's so much in *Superstar Saga*, with both the combat and the environmental interaction steadily increasing in sophistication as you move through the story.



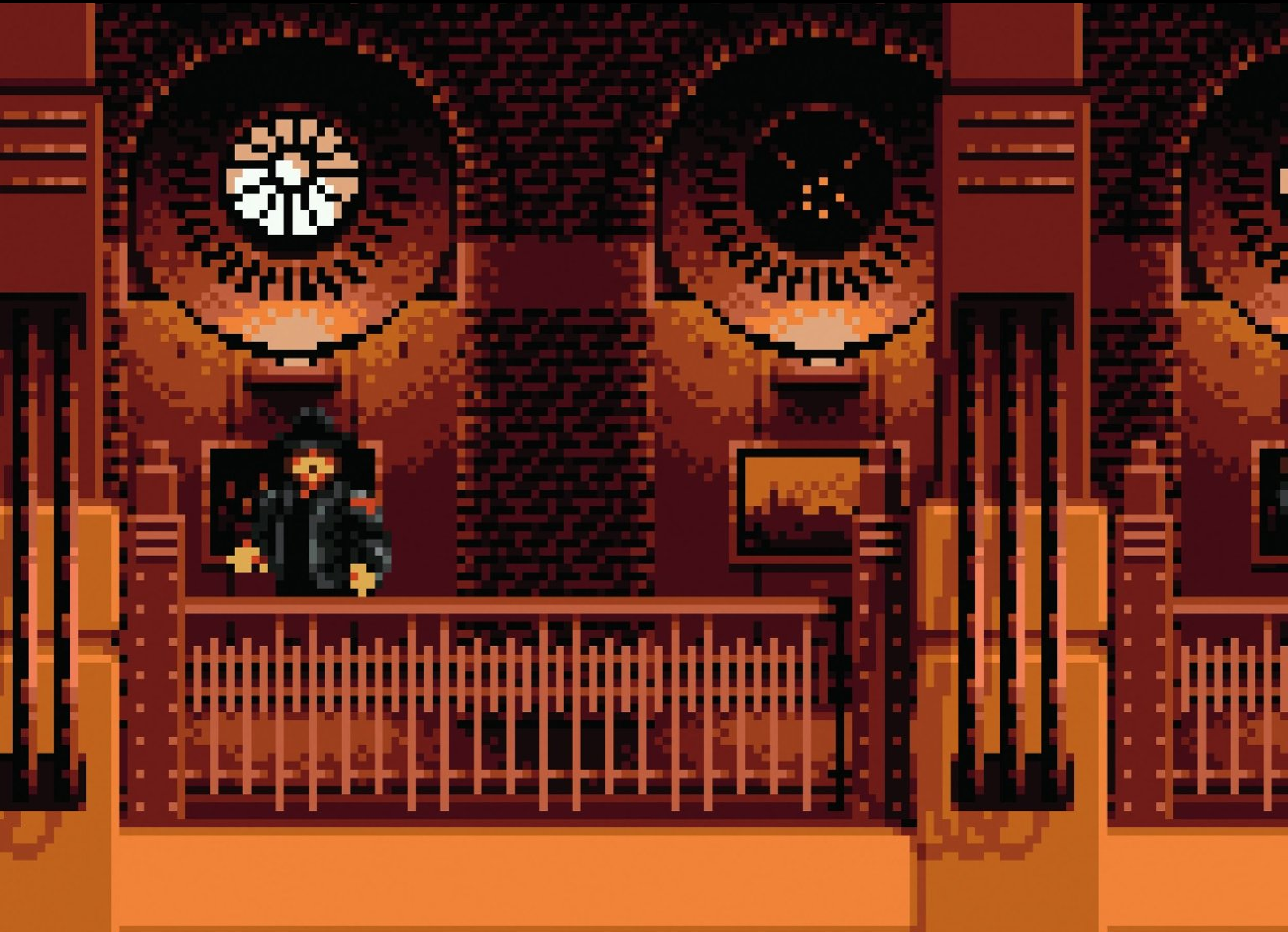
The best bit of the game, though, is that script. Crazy, hilarious and utterly devoted to the franchise, it's something Nintendo should be proud of. This is funny in a way that most scriptwriters can only dream of replicating. Cultish and utterly suited to the weird little world that Mario inhabits, it goes off on narrative tangents that the relatively story-free platformers would never dabble with. The Beanbean Kingdom is packed with amusing inhabitants who slide perfectly into this world of Koopas, plumbers and cheerful fungi, further exploring the side of the *Mario* universe that we usually see only as background detail. The volley of jokes comes with a cross-generational appeal, surprisingly witty on occasion and silly for most of the adventure.

Rather than dumping the grinding we associate with Japanese role-playing games on us, however, *Mario & Luigi* keeps things light at all times; no fights feel unnecessary and tiresome, while the stats are kept so brisk that no gamers, regardless of their skill and experience, get lost in the shuffle. Even in the most complicated battles later on, you'll never be hitting the 9999 attacks that are synonymous with the likes of *Final Fantasy*. There's nothing in *Superstar Saga* that is especially in-depth, yet it's the blend of well-done genre ideas and the delicate balance between them that is so consuming in this 20-hour experience.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Superstar Saga proved the *Mario* franchise's ability to fit any niche. This could be someone's first RPG or it could be their latest, and it wouldn't matter – it recaptured the humour of the first *Super Mario RPG* but opened up the concept to an even larger audience. Nintendo's ingenuity is in developing products that anyone can enjoy while generating a passionate response from its own audience, and *Superstar Saga* tackled a genre that is inherently built for the core gamer. Despite that, this game manages to retain the heart of *Mario*'s peerless platforming, offering more depth than the plumber's massive fan base is used to from other games bearing his name. The resulting *Mario* RPG series would go in highly bizarre story directions, yet so many of the funniest moments and best homages to the franchise's past came in this trailblazing first instalment.

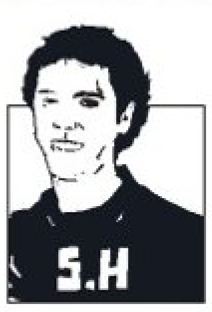




» RETROREVIVAL

Batman: The Videogame

THE FORGOTTEN BATMAN



» MEGA DRIVE
» SUNSOFT
» 1990

Punch the term '*Batman* videogames' into Wikipedia and you'll be faced with a list of games as wide as the Joker's maniacal smile.

From Ocean's *Batman* and Konami's *Batman Returns*, to the more recent *Arkham Asylum*, the Caped Crusader has managed to keep a pretty clean gaming rap sheet in comparison to his lycra-clad peers, and personally we would connect a lot of his success with the fact of him not being particularly superhero-y.

Batman's abilities come from his gadgets rather than radioactive spiders, gamma ray exposure or simply through being a demigod, and this makes him far more akin to conventional gaming heroes.

His signature armaments are basically a boomerang weapon and a grappling hook, two things that are pretty familiar with gamers. Moreover, that he's just a wealthy man in a rubber suit means it doesn't look ridiculous when you see him take a beating from a guy dressed in stonewashed jeans and a leather waistcoat, too.

Loosely based on the 1989 Tim Burton movie, Sunsoft's *Batman: The Videogame* came out so late (1990) that it was largely ignored upon its release: the batmania generated by the blockbuster movie had died down considerably at the time it came out, and the videogame limelight – rightly so – had been hogged by Ocean's excellent *Batman: The Movie*.

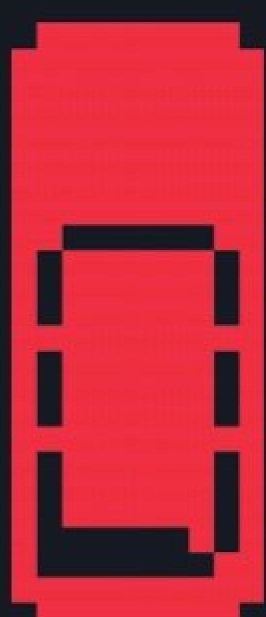
It's a real shame too as *Batman: The Videogame* is a decent Mega Drive brawler that features some great visuals that do a great job in capturing the gothic look of the film, an emotive soundtrack from composer Noaki Kodaka (Blaster Master) and some diverse and entertaining little levels that play closely to the events of the film.

The beat-'em-up action is also counterbalanced somewhat by two side-scrolling shooter levels that see Batman and Vicki Vale escape the Joker in the Batmobile, and Bats trying to save Gotham by bursting the Smilex-filled clown balloons from inside his Batwing.

A decent *Batman* game that may have passed you by, if you're looking for an entertaining Caped Crusader game to kill a few hours, then this one comes highly recommended. *

Trashman





Cyclists

Watch out for cyclists pedalling down the pavement. Get struck by one and the collision will cause Trashman to temporarily limp, slowing him down.

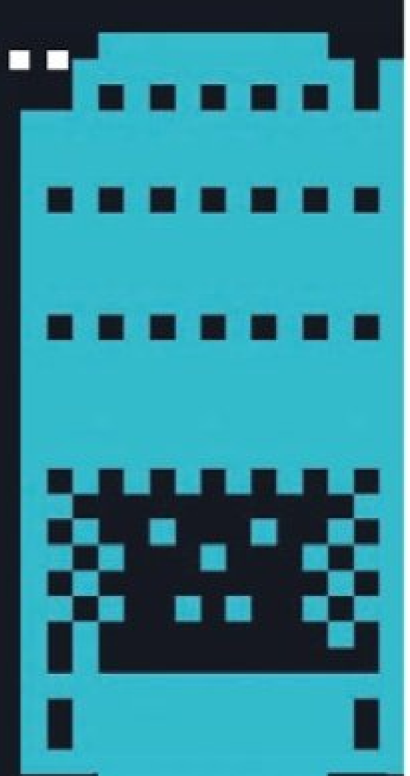
Cars

Despite taking place in a leafy suburb, the streets are surprisingly full of speeding fools, all driving identical-looking cars.



Dustcart

Slowly making its way up the road is the dustcart, which is where Trashman must deposit the garbage. He has to be quick, though, as it won't wait around.



Trashman

Our hero, the hard-working Trashman, might be working to an incredibly tight schedule, but he still has to make time for his customers.



Customers

If Trashman clears a bin without standing on their grass, the owner will invite him in for a nice chat. It's all a bit *Confessions Of A Dustman*.

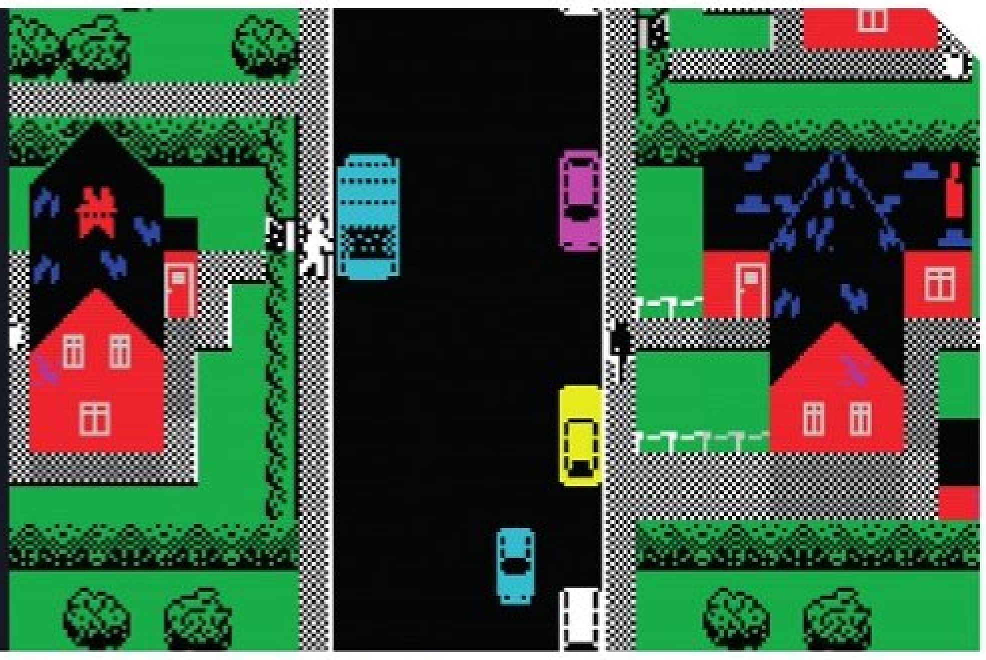
Dustbins

These are the objects of your desire. With each street you have to clear a mandatory number of bins before you can proceed to the next.

Proving that you could make a great game out of pretty much any subject if you approached it in the right way, *Trashman* was anything but a load of old rubbish. As a lowly refuse collector, it was your job to clean up the streets, literally, by clearing up the garbage of little computer people and being careful not to get killed by speeding lunatics, bitten by crazed dogs or crashed into by idiot cyclists. Stuart Hunt likes to get down and dirty.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



BEST ASPECT



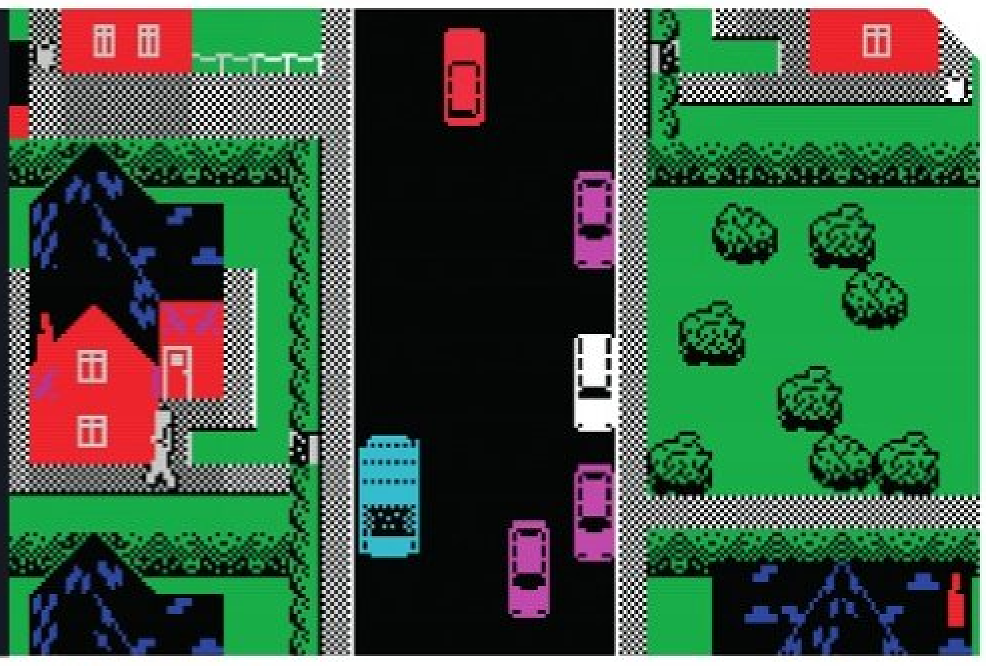
Good clean trashy fun

Thanks to the likes of *Manic Miner*, *Monty Mole* and *Paperboy*, working class heroes were well represented in videogames during the Eighties, but none of those classic titles captured the spirit of their associated job as successfully as *Trashman*. The little touches, humour and impressive attention to detail in its sedate gameplay made it such a joy to play. Graphically it ticked all the boxes too, with its top-down viewpoint providing the perfect overview of its colourful streets. It's a unique game with timeless gameplay, and that's why it's a classic.

The little things

Fusing elements of *Frogger* with *Paperboy*, what makes *Trashman* so entertaining is its design. Its gameplay essentially boiled down to helping Trashman avoid dangers to clear enough rubbish in an allotted amount of time. While this probably doesn't sound all that interesting on paper, the well-realised streets are what bring the whole experience to life. *Trashman* is full of nice little ideas that make it more involving, from naming your dustman and having your bonus time docked for trampling on well-tended lawns, to getting a peek behind the curtains of the bizarre lives of your customers.

A BLUFFER'S GUIDE



BEST GAG?



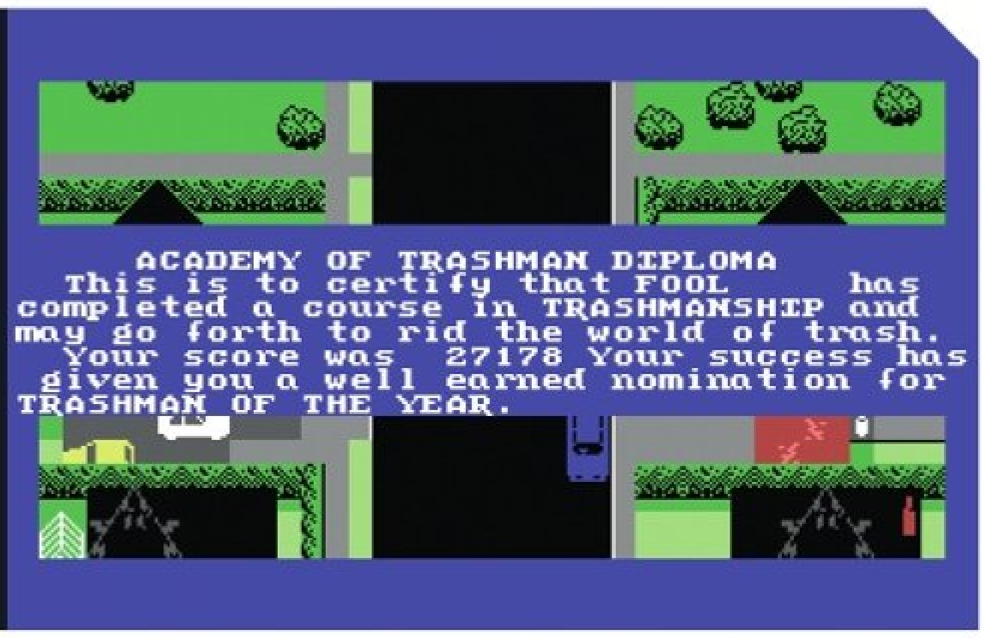
Man at work

If you're wondering how *Trashman* managed to take a laborious job and turn it into an entertaining computer game then allow us to explain. With each street you are given a requisite number of bins to empty. Once collected from the customers' front gardens, you must carry the bins to the dustcart, empty them out and then return them. You have to be mindful of busy traffic, cyclists and dangerous mutts, but mostly of a depleting bonus score, which is also your time limit. Fortunately, you can earn more time by stopping to chat to the snitching bozos to earn tips.

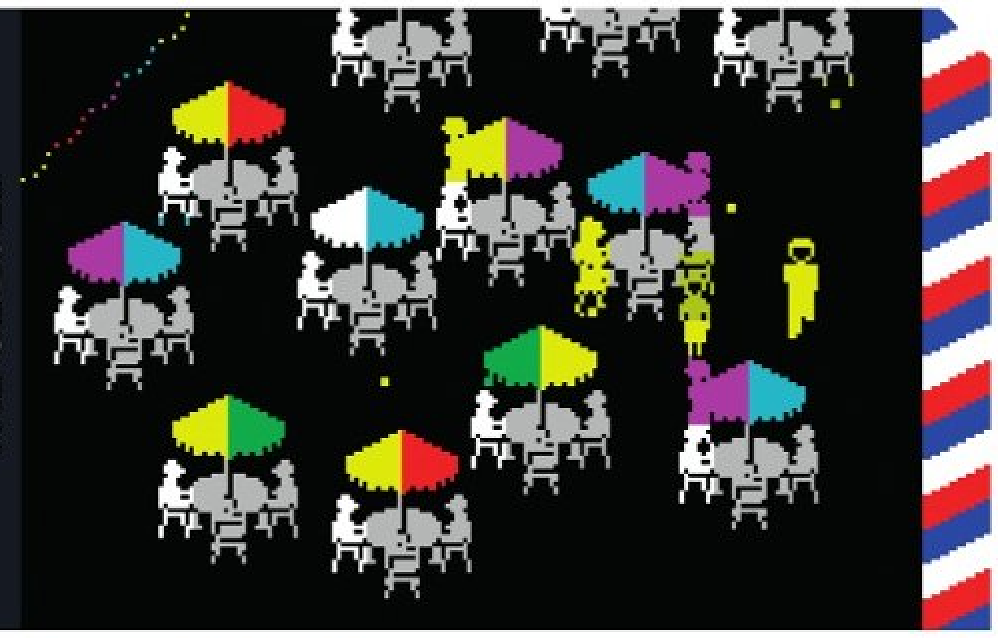
The old ones are the best ones

A strong part of *Trashman*'s charm is its quintessential British humour. There are a number of game references smattered throughout – from Trashman's delight at receiving a free Spectrum from a concerned mum, to a reference to creator Malcolm Evans' earlier hit *3D Monster Maze* when one customer offers him a copy. By far the most edgy gag in the entire game, though, occurs when Trashman is knocked down by a speeding car. Spelling the end of our hero, a news flash reporting on his death pops up on screen, and in the same story tastelessly mentions the favourite for the 'Trashman of the year' awards.

MAGIC MOMENT



THE SEQUEL

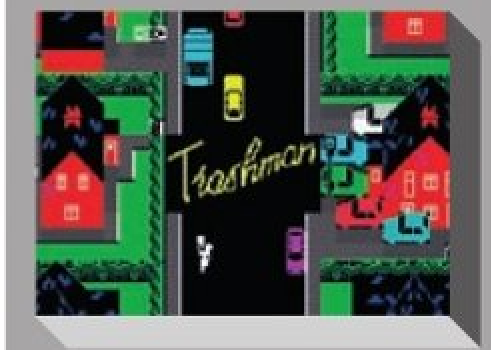


Kissing goodbye to a busy week

Our favourite moment in *Trashman* has been when completing a week's work, earning a diploma and finishing the game. It's not easy to do. The final street has you collecting a staggering 12 bins, and when you empty the final one its owner will invite you in for a quick drink. Take up the offer and Trashman will emerge from the house as Trashedman, completely sozzled and unsteady on his feet. It provides a funny close to the game that sees you helping the staggering hero slowly saunter to the end of his route in one piece. You can decline the drink, but you'll be missing out on a nice tip.

Dustman's holiday

After working his socks off, our hero took a busman's holiday for the sequel. *Travel With Trashman* saw the binman take his refuse-collection talents around different places on the globe. With elements of a business management sim, given that you must earn and manage your cash to buy tickets to each exotic destination, the sequel had our hero collecting up rubbish in some pretty unusual situations. A trip to Spain finds him collecting bouquets in a bullring, while the outside of a Parisian café is the setting for an outbreak of frogs. It's an entertaining sequel but not a patch on the original.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** SPECTRUM, C64, CPC
- **PUBLISHER:** NEW GENERATION SOFTWARE
- **DEVELOPER:** MALCOLM EVANS
- **RELEASED:** 1984
- **GENRE:** ACTION

What the press said… ages ago



Crash, 83%

"*Trashman* is an immensely playable game that is very addictive at first, but I think that quality might wear off after a while. Nevertheless, it's the best game that New Generation have produced yet."

What we think

It's an unusual game that has aged brilliantly. Indeed, if you've never played this evocative classic then we urge you to do so immediately. You won't regret getting your hands dirty.



The Bluffer's Guide to

Construction Software

Making videogames can be a complex process. But a few dedicated developers devoted their careers to software that allows anybody to make a game – with no coding required. Rob Boffard delves into the world of home game-making software, with help from industry stalwarts Paul Gregory, Lee Bamber and François Lionet

T first thing anybody playing a good videogame thinks is: 'That's really cool.' And the second is: 'I could do that.'

Very few go from that second thought to actually becoming a professional developer. Making games to an industry standard requires years of work and a huge, comprehensive knowledge of programming. For those who aren't technically minded it can be a daunting task.

Maybe that's the reason why game creation kits came into being. These kits, which have existed since the early Eighties, flipped the traditional gaming script on its head by allowing players to build their own games from scratch. These programs weren't made for programmers; they were made for people who didn't have that knowledge, who just wanted to muck about and make something really cool of their own. Evolving from simple physics machines into huge, multilayered pieces of game-building software, these creators spawned a huge industry – one that continues to evolve today.

KIT-BUILT

It started with Bill Budge. He was a developer working with Apple to build a pinball game, entitled *Raster Blaster*, for its Apple II. The 1981 game was a massive success, but Budge thought it was a little limited. For his next trick, he wanted to do something that no one had done before: build a program that would allow the player to construct their own pinball table without having to write a single line of code.

It was hard. Really hard. Despite teaming up with Electronic Arts, Budge was hamstrung by the Apple II's tiny processors and its complete inability to deal with sophisticated graphics or programming routines. However, he persevered, and the result – thanks to some clever code trickery – was 1983's *Pinball Construction Set*.

For the first time, players were in control not just of their character, but of their entire environment. *PCS* presented the player with a blank machine and left it up to them to drop in bumpers, walls and flippers – before firing in the ball and testing out their creation. Budge's *PCS* was a critical and commercial smash; it would pop up on numerous machines in the years following, and would form the blueprint for *Virtual Pinball* on the Sega Mega Drive.

Budge himself went on to other things – he worked for Sony for a time, and is now with Google – but what he'd started was something revolutionary. Suddenly, the big game developers didn't have as much power, and players were beginning to wake up to the possibilities of making their own worlds – not just living in ones built for them.

Throughout the Eighties, the Commodore 64 was the weapon of choice for budding game designers. The *Adventure Construction Set*, built by Stuart Smith for EA in 1984, was a massively ambitious title that gave the publisher a major boost. Not only were the graphics significantly more advanced than Budge's *PCS*, but the choices available to the budding designer were huge. Turn-based combat, four players, random encounters, shops, fully tweakable creatures – all there, and all wrapped up in a workable interface. There were others, too, all seeming to cater to specific genres; the *Racing Destruction Kit* – also by EA – allowed players to build their own tracks, while the *Shoot'Em-Up Construction Kit* from Sensible Software gave players the ability to draw their own sprites and animations.

The apotheosis of all this came in 1991: *The 3D Construction Kit*. Finally, players didn't just have a racetrack or a dungeon or a pinball table to build, they had a whole world.

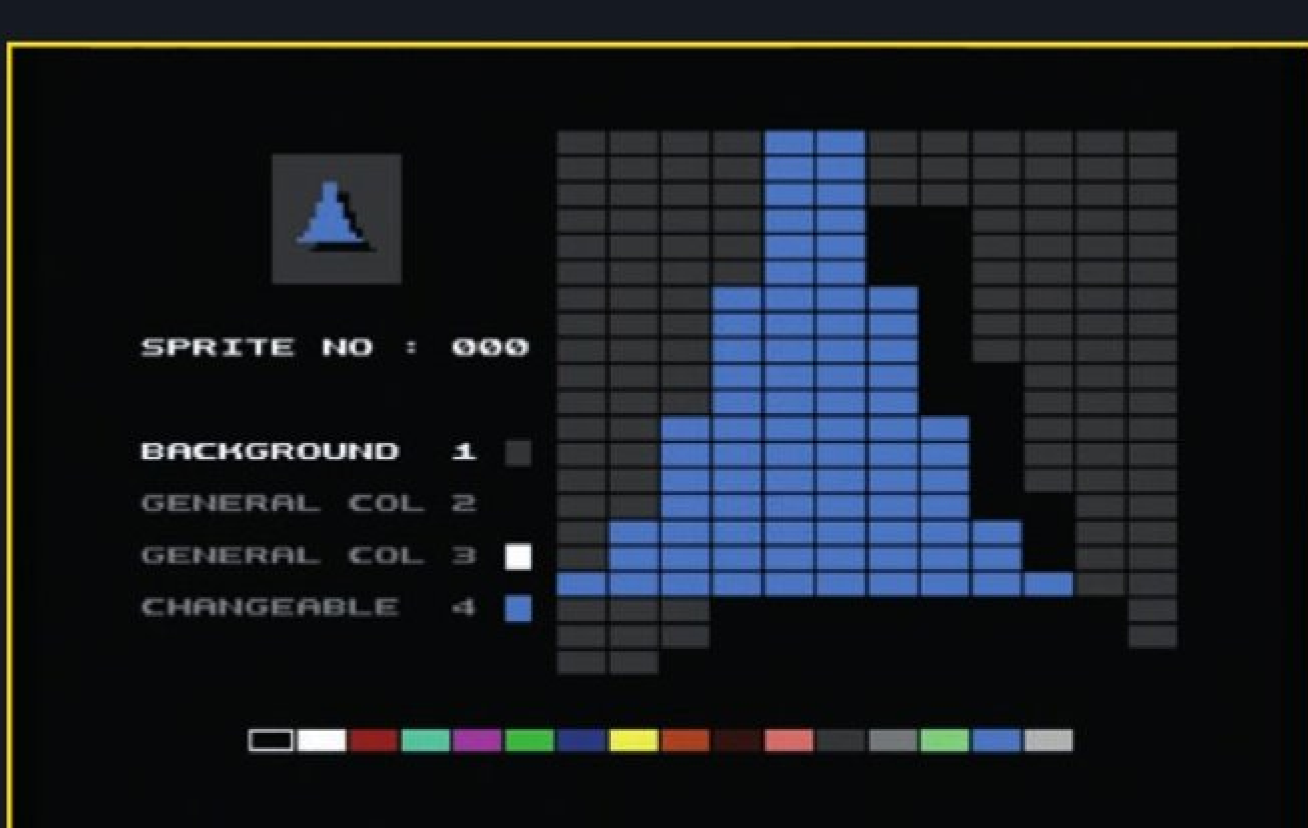
Released by Domark for the ZX Spectrum, it used a first-person perspective, dumped players in a large area and let them populate it with 3D objects like cubes, pyramids, windows and doors. In addition, a simple programmer in the software meant you could set conditions for objects – so, for example, you could hide a goblet inside a treasure chest, and only have it open when a series of buttons are activated in the right order. At the time, there was simply nothing else like it.

Paul Gregory helped build the *3DCK*. His first job out of school was with Incentive Software, which developed the software alongside Domark. The companies had

"These programs were made for people who just wanted to make something really cool of their own"



» [PC] A basic *Klik & Play* screen. Don't be fooled by the first-person viewpoint: this was 2D only.



» [C64] One of the levels in the excellent *Shoot 'Em-Up* Construction Kit.

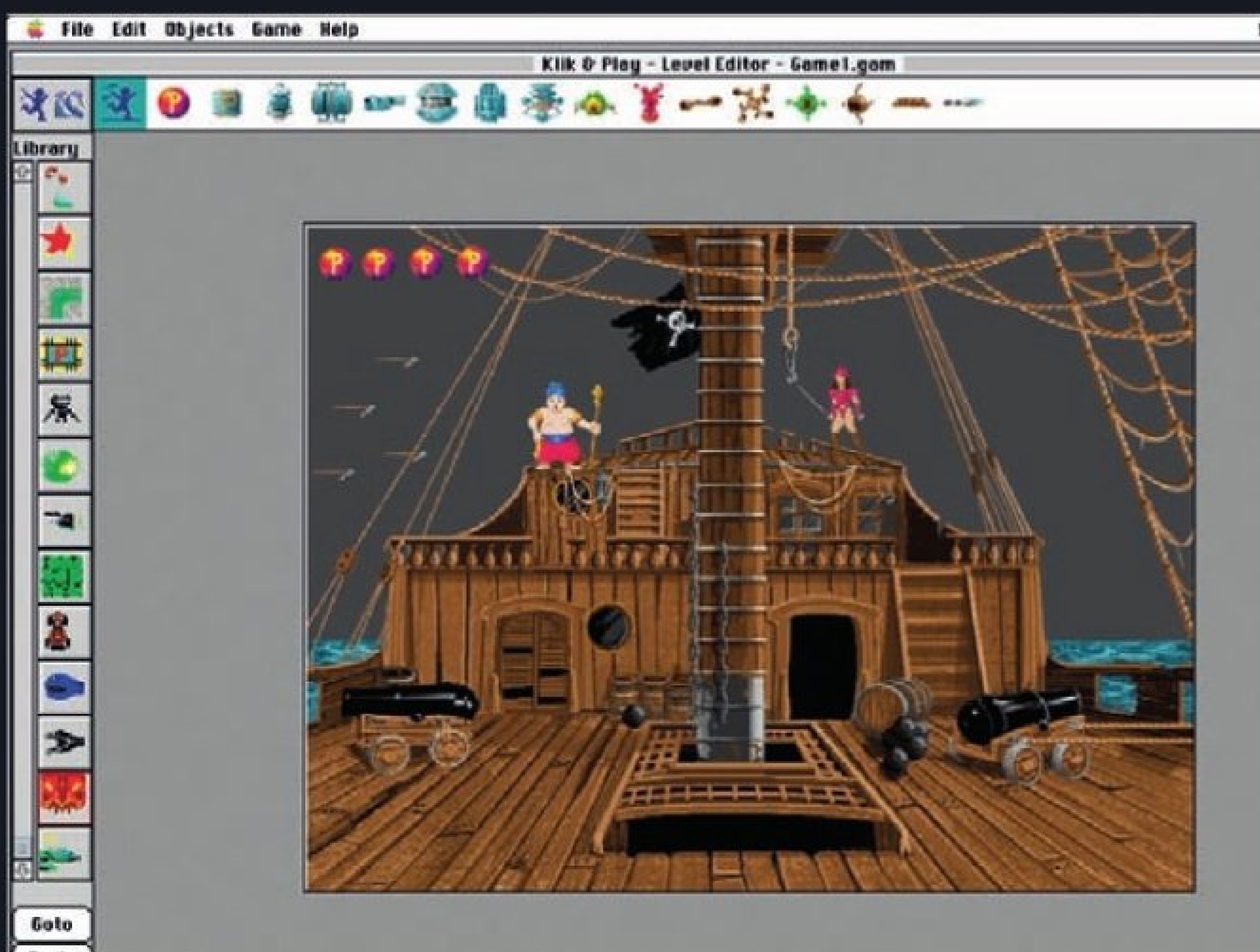
CONSOLE BUILDERS

When *Klik & Play* was released in 1994, consoles were already falling out of the market for homebrew game creation. The stringent development rules and no easy way to present game building meant that console games were strictly for the pros. Until the arrival of the PlayStation.

For a time, Sony marketed a PSone development kit known as the *Net Yaroze*, which inspired a healthy homebrew community. It wasn't an easy system to develop for, and was hugely expensive, but it did result in some great games like *Time Slip* and *Hover Car Racing*. These were good enough to appear on the cover discs of several game magazines.

Today, *Net Yaroze* is all but dead, with no PS3 kit on the horizon. The 360's *XNA Game Studio* is great for budding indie developers, but it requires programming knowledge and a PC. Maybe the success of the *LittleBigPlanet* series, this state of affairs might not be permanent.





» [PC] From space to the high seas, *Klik & Play* had a lot to offer. Including eunuchs, apparently.

been working with the Freescape engine, and Gregory says that as they approached the limit of what they could do with it, they wanted to go out with a bang. "We felt the obvious last step […] was to allow the consumer to create their own things and play with them," he says. "We tried to keep the programming to a minimum, and the language […] was always kept very simple."

One of the key reasons why the *3DCK* was so successful was that it did away with wireframe 3D in favour of fully realised objects. "Puzzle-type scenarios just aren't doable with wireframe stuff," says Gregory. "You can't hide things. You can't have things change in the game world in a way that would allow puzzles. With solid 3D, that all suddenly became possible. The creativity of level design and puzzle design bloomed, and that was shown in the games."

The *3DCK* was a smash hit, and reviewers raved about it – James Leach, writing in *Your Sinclair*, called it "an absolutely incredible piece of software". A sequel was released in 1992, which added additional options into the mix.

But as good as the *3DCK* was, the systems at the time just weren't ready. Blocks and pyramids and single-frame animations were only going to cut it for so long. "Machines at the time weren't perceived to be capable of producing fully immersive 3D," says Gregory. "What people wanted was nice, smooth, flowing 3D, like you get these days, but it just wasn't achievable at the time. So people moved away to something that machines were more capable of doing."

This something could have been a step backwards. In a way, it was: the next piece of game-building kit was entirely 2D. But this little piece of software – called *Klik & Play* by its French development team – would change everything.

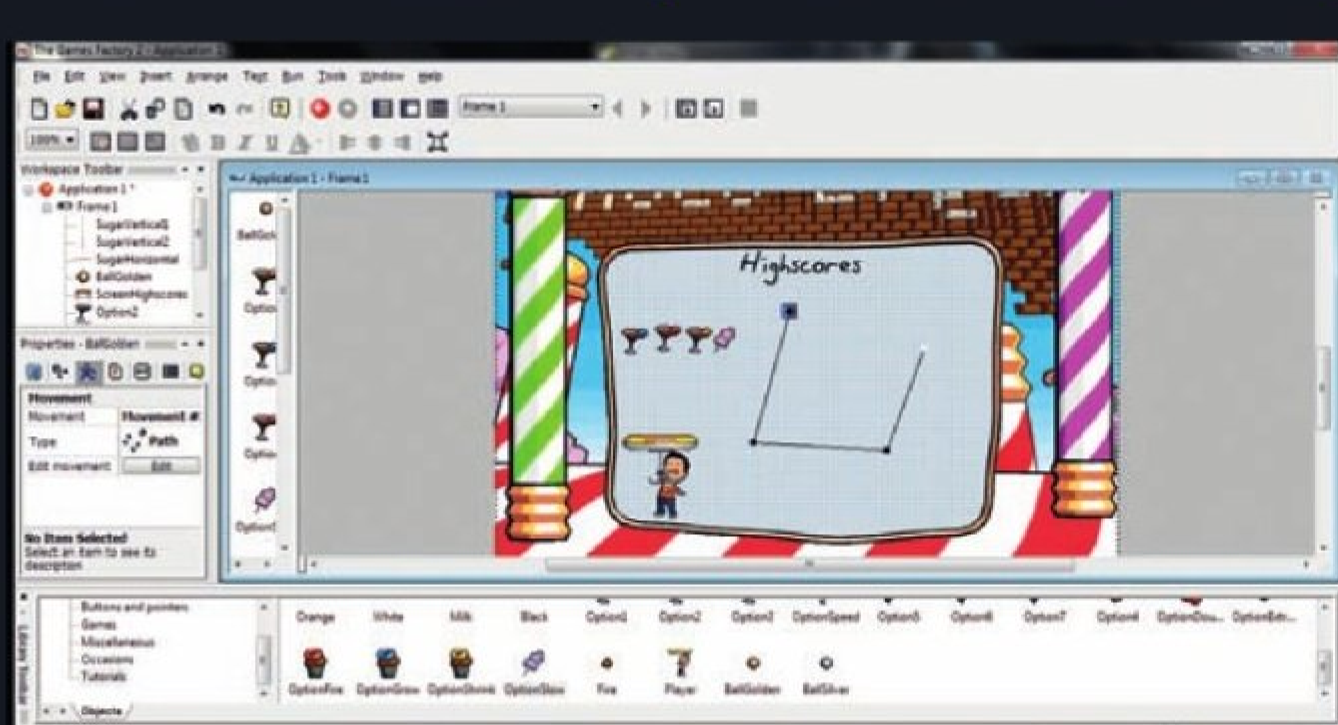
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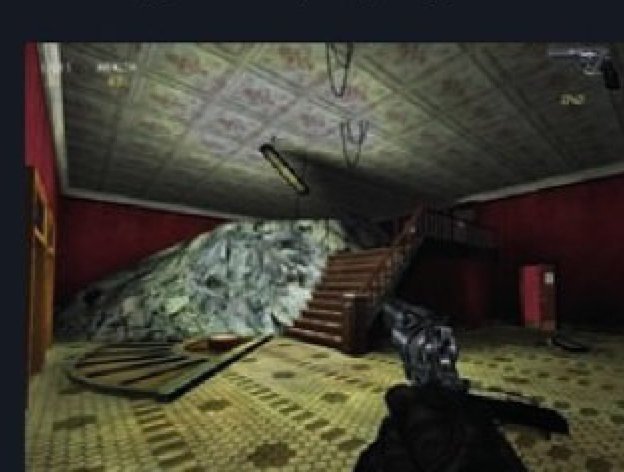
François Lionet is a jovial, balding Frenchman with a rolling voice. When he was 18, he saw an ad in an American magazine for an Ohio Scientific 6502 Superboard computer. When it had crossed the ocean to the town of Metz in the northeast of France, the young Lionet set about devouring books on computing, teaching himself the BASIC programming language in the process so he could work the machine. "It had no games on it, so I had to make them!" he laughs. "This machine was so rare in France – perhaps ten people in the whole country had it – and there was nothing for it. So I decided to make a *Batman* game, a *Space Invader* game, *Defender*."

From there, Lionet went on to make professional game coding software like STOS BASIC for the Atari ST and AMOS BASIC for the Amiga. But after a few years, he was tired of working with BASIC, and wanted to do something a little bit different. With his buddy Yves Lamoreux, he formed Clickteam, and in 1994 they released their first project, partnering up with Europress Software to develop it. This was *Klik & Play*, and it was a revelation.

For the first time, there was zero coding involved in fully building a game. "The biggest challenge was making games easy [to build] for dumb people on the PC!" says Lionet. "We wanted it to be mouse-driven, because Windows 3.1 was out, so it had to be drag-and-drop. We didn't want any programming language – everything with a mouse."

The software came packaged with hundreds of fully animated 2D sprites, ranging from dozens of spaceships to skateboarding kids to trees to gurning zombies to every type of explosion you could think of – and designers could quite happily make their own animated objects if they were a dab hand with pixel art. When placed, you could get these objects to move in predetermined paths, place them under player control, and set the type of gravity they would work under. The system had limitations – there was no scrolling, unless you programmed a




» [PC] By the time the *First Person Shooter Creator* rolled around, Lee Bamber and co had built some great tools.



TAKING IT ONLINE

Although many game creators were released before the advent of the internet, once the latter was up and running people began putting their games online. Today, there are huge homebrew communities, all devoted to different software and all publishing the games they've built – most of which can be downloaded for free. These communities are arguably behind the success of many software packages, and they provided a valuable tool for the developers to get feedback.

One of the biggest communities is one found on the forums of TheGameCreators' website, which has nearly 200,000 topics on every conceivable subject related to TGC software. "[The community's input] is indispensable," says Bamber, who has hired three programmers from their contributions to the forums. "They'll create their own plugins for the language. They'll add things to *FPS Creator* that I didn't even think was possible. They write complete games and send them to us. Every now and again, we recruit people from our community to work for us full time – they've demonstrated above and beyond the call of duty."

One sad aspect of the move to more advanced graphics has been the demise of communities devoted to earlier programs like *K&P*, *The Games Factory*, *3DCK* and *PCS*, although there are still sites like The Daily Click that showcase plenty of downloadable games.

Anatomy of Klik & Play

Boot up this seminal game creation software, and here's what you'll see…

LIBRARY

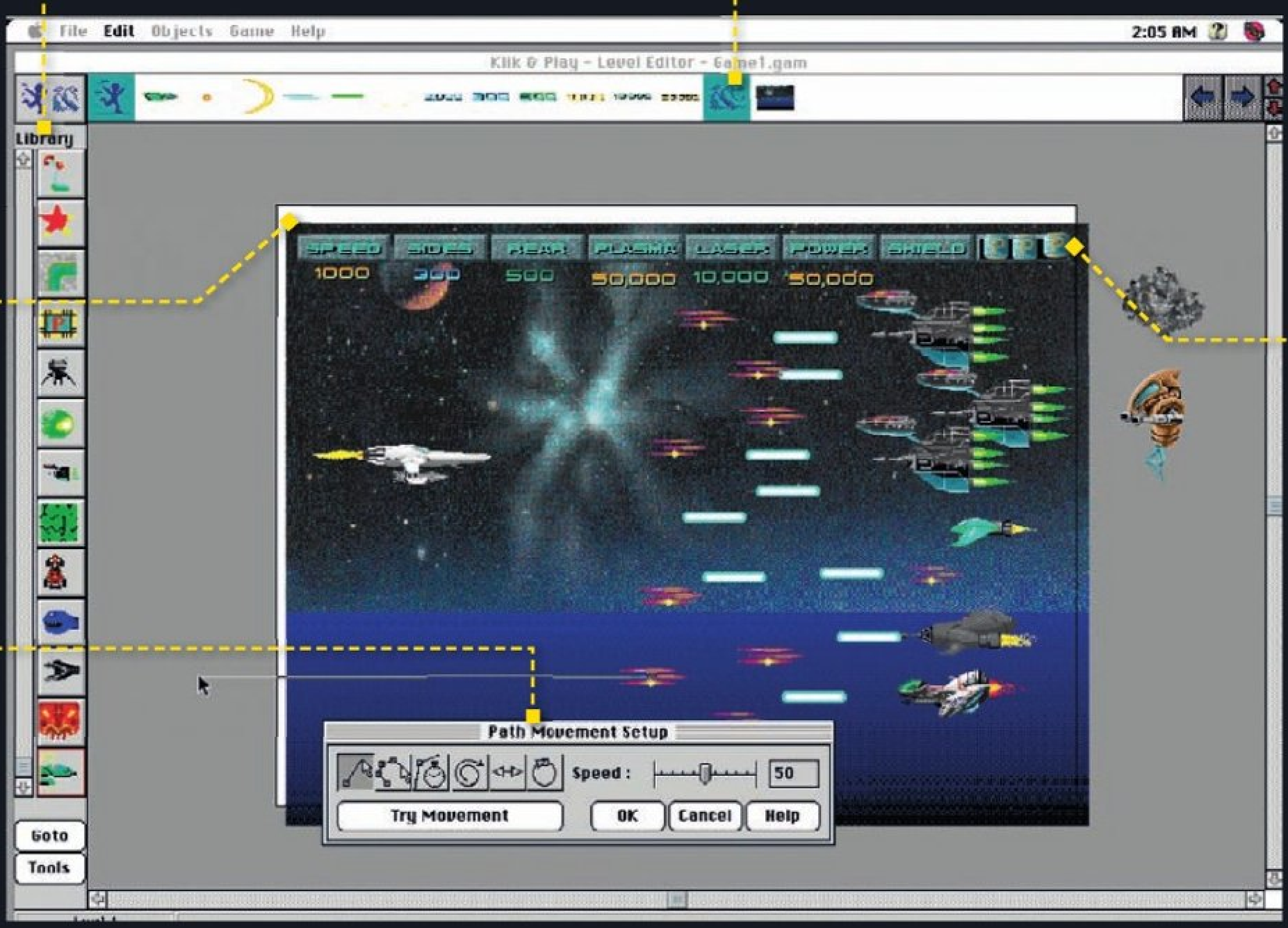
K&P organised all your sprites into categories, like spaceships, characters, monsters and backdrops. There were a surprisingly large number of categories – it could be a little intimidating when you first jumped in.

THE BACKGROUND

The white area was your canvas. The player would see anything in the white area, although you could position objects off-screen as well. The program contained a huge number of backdrops, from a haunted castle to an alien planet.

MOVEMENT

A simple right click would bring up movement options: you could get them to bounce around randomly, set them under player control, move if something bumped them, or – as here – get them to follow a predetermined path.



OBJECT SELECTION

Click on a library category, and it would pop up along the top of the screen. Here, you could click and drag your preferred sprite onto the level, and place it where you want. Handily, you could set the program to preview animations in the selector.

LIVES

K&P included a fully customisable numbers set, easily letting you not only set player lives, but also player energy. So, for example, you could set it so that every time a player was hit they'd lose energy, and if they lost all energy they'd lose a life.

bunch of stars, for example, to move across the screen – but you could have multiple single-frame levels with different objects in them, all arranged in the Storyboard Editor, which allowed you to control the flow of your game from title screen to end credits.

"First sight of the Event Editor was an intimidating one: it looked like a massive spreadsheet"

But it was the back end that truly set *K&P* apart from its predecessors. This was the Event Editor, which Lionet says he and Lamoreux came up with in a "productive afternoon".

First sight of the Event Editor was an intimidating one: it looked like a massive spreadsheet. But what it did was let designers set conditions for a level: if the space commando collides with the tentacled alien, then create explosion and subtract one from life counter. In a masterstroke, coding was completely eliminated, and extremely complex gameplay mechanics could be added to a game from little more than clicking on prebuilt icons.

K&P established Clickteam, and helped it get an American distribution deal through Maxis, famous for the *SimCity* games. Later iterations of the software, like *The Games Factory* and *Multimedia Fusion*, were more graphically complex and introduced missing elements like the scrolling. And for a long time, Lionet, Lamoreux and their team were the ones to beat.

But soon gamers were moving on. The PlayStation and Saturn were available, and 2D sprites were very much on the way out. It wasn't Clickteam that would build the next generation of game design software, but one of its disciples.

FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR

Europress was instrumental in the success of Clickteam, and one of the people who worked there was Lee Bamber, who helped Clickteam tune its software. "I was given the job of writing little games," says the Northerner. "I guess I impressed them." After learning all he could, Bamber was contracted to work on the Lego Mindstorm toys, and when he came back to Europress he found he was bored. "I'd worked for so long on my own. So I decided to set up my company with a little piece of software I'd been writing in my spare time, which was to take a Game BASIC, and then put it onto the Windows PC so people can write their own games. I set up a website, put it on there. I had no income, but no bills there, so it sort of worked out. It started as an entrepreneurial hobby and then it grew from there! That was 1999."

Everyone, Bamber says, thought he was mad – quitting a solid job



» [PC] Enemy models have gotten better and better in the *FPSC*.



» [C64] The title screen of the *Racing Destruction Kit*. Forget construction, it's all about blowing stuff up…

and setting up on his own, under the name The Game Creators. His first product was the text-based editor *DarkBASIC One*, and with it Bamber began to build up his company, initially duplicating discs on his own CD writer and using his printer to print labels. Fortunately, he caught a break: a former colleague, Rick Vanner, signed on, and helped Bamber to hook up with a company called Actualise.

It was for this company that Bamber designed his most important software: *The 3D Game Maker.* In many ways, it was similar to the *3D Construction Kit* of ten years before; however, it brought along not only a lot more freedom but also (obviously) much better graphics. Now, would-be developers deride the *3DGM* as not much more than a toy (one member of The Game Creators forums refers to it as "little more than a learning tool for the basics of game design") but at the time, it was an impressive piece of kit.

It wasn't, however, an easy one to build. *The 3D Game Maker* was released in 2003, after eighteen months and £180,000 of investment.

"We realised quite quickly that there were a lot of games that people wanted to make," says Bamber, "not just the ones that were popular at the time. What we did with *The 3D Game Maker* was we kept the gameplay simple, but we allowed people to do lots of different genres. You could do first-person, third-person, flying game, driving game, simple games… We put a lot of effort into different styles of graphics because if all we did was say, sci-fi, you would use the software for five minutes then get bored and put it back on the shelf. We did cartoon, wild west, sci-fi, medieval – it made the software interesting.

"What we also did was that you could customise the models. You could scan your face and put it onto a bad guy or end of level boss. You could see your friend's faces on the different things you could shoot."

By today's standards, *The 3D Game Maker* is, indeed, pretty simplistic, but like *Klik & Play* for Clickteam, it helped establish TGC as one of the frontrunners. Since then they've branched out into more complex and accomplished software.



» [C64] The very first game creator for the layman: *The Pinball Construction Set.*

They've added physics mods to their lineup and made tools for pro developers. But they've kept their eye on the non-coding layman, and in 2005, they responded to their rapidly growing community's request for something that was, as Bamber puts it, "a little more grown up."

This was the *First-Person Shooter Creator.* "We thought, let's do a game creator that didn't require any programming," Bamber explains,



» [PC] The front end of the *3D Game Maker.* You built your game in the Environment Editor.

DIY design

Very few homebrew games made it out to mass distribution. We've dug up some of the gems…



RIVERS OF LIGHT

» **Released:** 1984
» **Publisher:** EA
» **Developer:** Stuart Smith

■ The *Adventure Construction Set* might have had somewhat limited graphics, but it certainly didn't limit the imagination of author Stuart Smith. Smith created a lengthy adventure game inspired by the story of Gilgamesh, and set the player on an epic quest in 3000 BC. It also contained the immortal line "Place an animal bone on my table, and I will happily make you an image of great mother." Which is reason enough alone to check it out.

AMADEUS REVENGE

» **Released:** 1988
» **Publisher:** System Editoriale srl
» **Developer:** Fernando Zanini

■ Who said games can't be cultural? This was built using the *Shoot'Em-Up Construction Kit,* and you play as – you guessed it – Mr Mozart himself. Your goal is to complete his Piano Concerto No. 25, and you do it not through years of practice and social alienation, but by running up the screen, tagging musical notes and stopping enemy musicians from throwing in dud ones. The game made great use of the Commodore 64's sound chip.





THE TUNNEL ADVENTURE

» **Released:** 1991
» **Publisher:** N/A
» **Developer:** Mieke Van Der Poll

■ *3D Construction Kit* games didn't really see official release, but there are various game files floating around the internet. One of the better-designed ones is Mieke Van Der Poll's *The Tunnel Adventure,* an ambitious game which sees you exploring the gloomy tunnels inside a mountain. The game made full use of the ability to pick up and move objects that the *3D Construction Kit* provided, and even today it's got a great deal of charm.

GUNNER 3

» **Released:** 2000
» **Publisher:** N/A
» **Developer:** Gary Gasko

■ *Gunner 3* uses scrolling, for which Gasko says he had to circumvent *Klik & Play*'s programming. The game is genuinely good, and surprisingly complex, with twenty different fully-selectable weapons for your character to choose (from a nail gun , double-wave beam gun to a 'volter'). With jumping and shooting over eight levels, the action is fast and frenetic, and the art style is gorgeous, relying on bespoke sprites to get its personality across.



"that didn't require anyone to create their own graphics, but still allowed you to piece together a game that reminded you of playing *Duke Nukem* or *Doom* or *Half Life*. We knew how to do it – because we'd done game creators before that, we knew in our heads how it was going to look, so we just did it.

"You could draw, paint your levels, drop a few things in, press a button and it would build the entire executable and run it, and you had an FPS game. It was so popular that we've been updating it and adding things to it ever since, including 53 model packs, which are crammed with scenery and objects and loads of characters."

THE FUTURE

In the past few years, attention has shifted to Media Molecule's *LittleBigPlanet* and its sequel. What's interesting, though, is that while the *LBP* series certainly has stunning graphics and excellent presentation, it is in many ways a lot simpler and more limiting than programs like *Klik & Play, The 3D Games Maker* and the *FPS Creator*. What *LBP* has done is helped bring the idea of non-professionals building their own games to a whole new generation of gamers.

"These ideas – the basic building blocks of all games – have been around since Pong"

Bamber laughs when asked if he'd beaten *LBP* to the punch: "If you've been in the industry long enough you realise that what goes around comes around. These ideas – the basic building blocks of all games – have been around since *Pong*. I think what happens is, we can reinvent these building blocks each time new technologies and new capabilities come into consumer space. We can reuse those early ideas and reinvent them – and they do feel new and innovative. They're always built on things that came before."

Clickteam and TheGameCreators are still around, and both Bamber and Lionet say that their next big target is mobile apps, ones which allow the building of games that will work on all platforms. Clearly, this is one cool idea that isn't going anywhere.

MACHINE HEAD

One early oddity in the game creation market was *The Incredible Machine*, published by Sierra. Not so much a game as a quirky physics simulator, the object of it was to design a massively over complicated and tricky machine, using everyday objects like seesaws, blenders, footballs and bowling balls to perform a simple task like bouncing a ball into a basket.

It was pretty one-dimensional, but the actual physics were solid, and you could wile away hours putting together increasingly ridiculous machines. The game did well enough to produce a host of sequels, most of which appeared on both PC and Mac. Today, it lives on as an iPad app.

If you look around, there are other strange entries into the market. Our favourite is the RPG Maker, a Japanese production which was reasonably well received when it was released in 1998. It does, however, hold a special place in our hearts for having the most unintentionally hilarious ad voiceover in history. You'll find it on YouTube.



DIY design

Very few homebrew games made it out to mass distribution. We've dug up some of the gems...



TRIUMPH! WAR 2099

» **Released:** 2001
» **Publisher:** Darksun Games
» **Developer:** Anthony Lopes

Unusually for a game developed with the Clickteam software series, *Triumph!* lets you command a full squad, issuing instructions like attack or follow. It added an element of strategy to an otherwise by-the-book shooter, which nonetheless impressed with the sheer volume of stuff happening on-screen. As an added bonus, the title screen had some truly outstanding hand-drawn artwork, all cartoony characters and gorgeous colours. *Triumph!* was just that.

TREMOR 3

» **Released:** 2003
» **Publisher:** N/A
» **Developer:** Mark Pay

The Clickteam game community was huge for a few years, and *Tremor 3* was one of its shining stars – Mark Pay building a quality deathmatch experience. *Multimedia Fusion*, a later Clickteam release, might not have been equipped for your usual FPS shenanigans, but with multiple modes – including King Of The Hill – it didn't really matter. A hugely enjoyable slice of gameplay which still stands up well today. It's freely downloadable online for Windows.





GET OUT!

» **Released:** 2009
» **Publisher:** N/A
» **Developer:** MadLad Designs

A scary atmosphere can be difficult to get across in homebrew games, or, indeed, any videogame. Fortunately, this slice of *FPS Creator* goodness manages it successfully. There's not much plot – you're stuck in a dungeon with zombies, and you have to get out – but what the game lacks in narrative it makes up for with an incredibly creepy atmosphere. The detail paid to the lighting and the terrifying music make this a must-play.

ALPHA PROJECT

» **Released:** 2010
» **Publisher:** N/A
» **Developer:** Lewis

A wonderfully complex and detailed FPS, built on TheGameCreators' *FPS Creator*. The plot is bonkers, involving a biotech company called, er, BioTech Industries, a lethal serum, an ex-British Army security officer as a protagonist and a cure for the common cold. It's nonetheless a supremely well-built game, and will satisfy any FPS fan with its hefty run-and-gun action. It's available for free download from TheGameCreators forums.



» YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO FORGOTTEN GAME SYSTEMS

OBSCURA MACHINA

#8 Pippin



JUST THE FACTS

The Pippin hardware is essentially a stripped second generation Power Macintosh

Despite many modern websites listing the year of release as 1995, the Bandai Pippin Atmark was released in Japan on 26 March 1996

The machine retailed for 64,800 yen and $599 US

It was discontinued by Bandai in 1998

Inside, it was fitted with a 66MHz PowerPC 603 RISC microprocessor

It is notable for being the first console to feature out-of-the-box internet, beating the Sega Dreamcast by two years

The hardware supported RAM upgrades and featured "PCI-like" expansion capability

Supported standard Apple keyboards and mice with adaptors

It could be hacked to run full operating systems

In the end, accessories outnumbered the console hardware produced

Today, software often sells for more than actual hardware thanks to some extremely limited production runs

Apple saw the multimedia boom, something the Macintosh played a large part in with titles like *Myst*, and decided to use this technology to branch out into other markets, inspired by devices such as the 3DO.

Of course, most know how the 3DO panned out, but for those who don't, here's a hint: it didn't do brilliantly. But Apple had a few tricks up its sleeve. The Pippin wouldn't be just an entertainment system, but also an inexpensive multimedia and internet-capable computer, an alternative to a desktop.

It was essentially a stripped-down second generation Power Macintosh, complete with a custom version of the System 7.5.2 OS included on every disc. It was fitted with a 66MHz PowerPC 603 microprocessor, 6MB combined system and video memory, a 4x CD-ROM drive and supported up to 16.7 million colours.

The internationalised hardware supported 100-240V power sources and also output NTSC/PAL and VGA with the flick of a switch. Additionally, it was region free and lacked copy protection.

Despite later announcing plans to do so, Apple initially didn't want to release its own model, opting to license the technology to other companies, as was the case with the 3DO. The first up to the plate was Bandai.

Parents know Bandai for destroying the youth of the Western world with *Power Rangers* and *Tamagotchi*, whereas the geekier crowd know it for its merger with Namco and various entertainment products, including consoles. It wanted to make a more grandiose attempt at capturing the market after the child-focused Playdia console, and teamed up with Apple.

The Bandai models shipped with a 14.4k modem and the AppleJack controller, which sported a trackball at its centre. A keyboard with an attached drawing tablet was among the accessories.

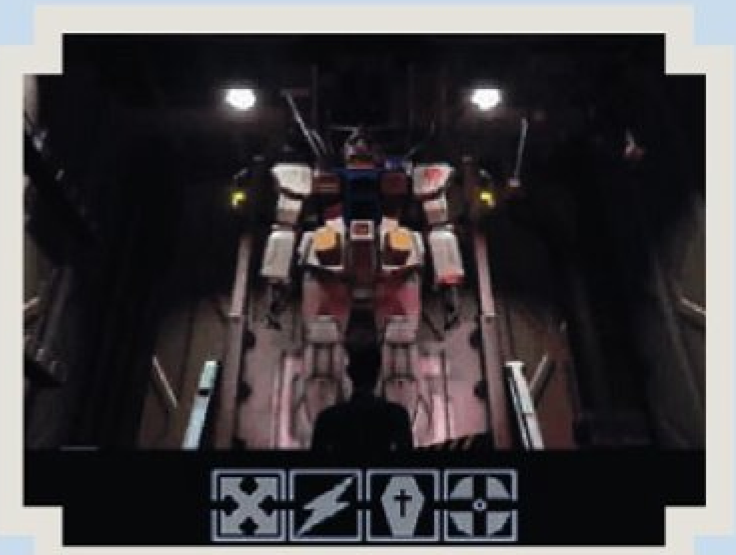
The white Pippin Atmark was released in Japan on 28 March 1996. In its first month it shipped 16,000 units, and fewer than 80 titles were reported to have been released during its life. The black US model, known as the Pippin @World, fared even worse, with fewer than 20 titles released, not including packed-in software. Many unsold units were repackaged as Atmarks back in Japan, making these US models the rarer variety.

In the end, it was reported that out of the fewer than 100,000 consoles manufactured by Bandai, only 42,000 were sold. When Steve Jobs returned as Apple's CEO in 1997, the Pippin was one of the first projects to be axed.

Over in Europe, an Ireland-based company called Katz Media licensed the Pippin technology, with 5,000 consoles reportedly manufactured. Its model, the Pippin KMP 2000, is the rarest, as it wasn't available to the general public. Instead, Katz signed deals with companies to provide internet access and software to their customers, clients and employees. A development console was also available for $1,000 US.



» [Pippin] *Gadget* was a graphical adventure in the same vein as *Myst*. It came out for the Pippin but is now better known for its PC, Mac and PlayStation versions.



Apple may have seemed the least likely to enter the gaming market during the Nineties, but this is exactly what the brave, pioneering company did. Andrew Gray reveals the Pippin's doomed history

PERFECT THREE

SUPER MARATHON

A one-man port of the first two games in Bungie's pre-*Halo* FPS trilogy. The biggest change was that defeated players respawned in the same level instance and could loot their own corpse, as in network games.



TUNIN'GLUE

The first product from NanaOn-Sha, creator of *PaRappa The Rapper*, *Tunin'Glue* was more of a sequencer toy than a game, yet it remains fun today and a fine example of the multimedia titles available.



THE JOURNEYMAN PROJECT: PEGASUS PRIME

This stupendous remake features enhanced visuals and additional puzzles, but the same plot involving the investigation of a series of temporal disturbances.







» [Pippin] Despite Bandai using its popular properties like *Dragon Ball Z* and *Gundam*, they weren't enough to make the Pippin a success.

So why did the Pippin fail? Pundits claimed it suffered from an identity crisis. Despite Apple intending it as a low-cost internet-capable computer, it looked and was perceived as a games console at a time when the giants already had a strong foothold, not to mention that it was overpriced in that market at $599 when the Sega Saturn had recently dropped to $199. To make matters worse, computers had plummeted in price, making its appeal as a low-cost alternative vanish. A last-ditch effort to market it as a set-top box went almost entirely unnoticed.

Software was also a problem. For one, there simply wasn't much offered, most coming from Bandai. Multimedia titles such as the alluringly named *Exotic Sushi* were widespread, but the boom had quieted. A handful of productivity software was also released, but mainly an overabundance of edutainment titles were on offer.

As for games, many were multimedia-focused, including FMV titles like *Terror T.R.A.X.* and *Gundam 0079: The War For Earth*, or adventure titles such as *Gadget*, *L-Zone* and *Victorian Park*. The popularity of these sorts of games had dropped significantly, it being all about the polygons.

Strategy games were also somewhat common, with a port of *Nobunaga's Ambition Returns* plus a smattering of board, card and tactics games, many using Bandai properties. *Gundam Tactics: Mobility Fleet 0079* is a popular example, but like the adventure and FMV games, they lacked mass market appeal.

A few polygon pushers were released, such as supposed *Ridge Racer* killer *Racing Days*, but network play and a texture editor couldn't distract from an embarrassing frame rate and boring physics. Another was a port of EA's *Shockwave Assault*, which was hardly a system seller by this point.

Although some Mac developers contributed games, the quality was scattershot and few people knew who they were outside of the Mac gaming community. In short, the Pippin lacked a killer app.

Today, it's a hot collector's item due to its rarity, but for most the Pippin doesn't offer much to justify the expense, with most of the better games available elsewhere. Some Pippin software will even run on older Macs and their emulators.

In many ways the Pippin was ahead of its time, foreshadowing the future of consoles. But it was a mismanaged mess and remains a laughing stock in gaming history.

Of course, now iOS devices are a huge part of the gaming market and Apple is one of the most valuable companies in the world, so it worked out in the end…

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» *G.I. Joe* is fully loaded with characters and vehicles from the television show. Fan service was clearly high on Konami's agenda.

» Pretty much everything can be blown to smithereens, and the game almost vomits cannon fodder all over the screen. Basically, there's no respite.

» Each character has two attacks: a standard shot that they can upgrade to fire at a higher velocity and a rocket launcher that fires smart bombs. Sadly, both are shared by the four characters.

G.I. JOE: A REAL AMERICAN HERO

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **When it came to turning hit kids' TV shows into hit videogames, Konami had the art pretty much perfected. The developer put out a raft of popular arcade hits based on animated shows throughout the Nineties, and most of them did their respective fans proud.**

Originally released in the Sixties, and known over here as *Action Man*, *G.I. Joe*'s popularity skyrocketed after it was relaunched in 1982 as *G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero*. This canny rejuvenation saw the toys become smaller and the franchise centring on two factions: G.I. Joe, a team of good guys; and a band of nasty terrorist types known as Cobra Command. The rebirth sparked an animated show and a raft of videogames.

This unconverted arcade title based on the series was only released in America, and at a time when the popularity of the series was beginning to fade – perhaps a contributing factor to why the game was never converted to home systems.

What makes *G.I. Joe* unique is that rather than falling back on its successful beat-'em-up formula, Konami turned it into an on-rails run-and-gun game, similar to Taito's *Rambo III* arcade, or *Space Harrier* with its wings clipped. The story saw Duke, Snake Eyes, Scarlett and Roadblock trying to thwart Cobra's attempt at world domination, and the action was split up into three missions, each rammed with familiar enemies, boss villains and vehicles taken from the show.

If we had one criticism of *G.I. Joe*, it's that the wanton destruction feels a little too outrageous, and because of this *G.I. Joe*'s gameplay can feel a bit repetitive. With little to enemy actions beyond running towards you while firing their guns, they're clearly nothing more than cannon fodder.

Ultimately, *G.I. Joe* feels perfectly trained to deliver short-term, high-intensity arcade action but little else, which is probably another reason why this quartet of super soldiers never made it home.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SPACE HARRIER 1985

We wanted to go for Taito's *Rambo III* coin-op, but as it too was never converted to home systems, in the end we went with Sega's sublime *Space Harrier*. In terms of colour, approach and exhilaration, both games share a clear bond.

NITRO BALL

■ **Developer:** Data East ■ **Year:** 1992 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun



» [Arcade] A cross between a game show, American football and a battle to the death. Obviously.

■ **We've come across** plenty of strange games on these pages, but few are as wacky as *Nitro Ball*, which basically takes the concept of *Smash TV* and then mixes it with a completely ludicrous pinball theme. Just like in the Williams classic, you play the role of a hapless contestant in a future game show gone wrong, and your mission is to work your way through each stage, blasting away all and sundry.

All of the levels are designed to resemble pinball tables. Bumpers and targets litter the stages to shoot in order to release pick-ups and weapons, and your character can occasionally transform into an invincible ball to bounce around the level, killing everything he touches.

In addition to *Nitro Ball*'s unusual gameplay, also notable is its varied level design. Like pinball tables, each level has a particular theme. These range from American football to a horror level set in a town full of zombies and spectres, or a space station overrun with *Terminator*-style robots.

As an entertaining and unusual title that fans of *Smash TV* should certainly take time to hunt down, *Nitro Ball* is the pick of our unconverted titles this month.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SMASH TV 1990



It might not feel as slick, the bosses as memorable nor the controls as tight, but *Nitro Ball* could still be a spiritual sequel to *Smash TV*. The similarities are striking. Williams' game received no shortage of ports, with the SNES and C64 versions being the best of the bunch.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

QUIZ & DRAGONS 1992



We are cheating a tad with this selection given that it only appeared on a couple of *Capcom Classics Collection* volumes, but given that it also takes an existing franchise and skews it into a quiz format, we could think of no better alternative.

PROFESSOR PAC-MAN

■ **Developer:** Bally Midway ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Quiz



» [Arcade] Any reasonably clever person isn't going to have a problem here. If you're Darran, however…

■ ***Professor Pac-Man*** was one of Bally Midway's unlicensed US *Pac-Man* sequels, and it was a huge departure from the series' dot-munching origins. This can be deemed more a strange spin-off than sequel, though, as it plonks Pac-Man in the role of a professor asking the player multiple-choice pictorial questions.

While *Professor Pac-Man* certainly didn't set our world alight, we actually found it quite enjoyable, especially as faster answers increase your score.

A typical question will see you shown a picture of a mug and then being asked to select its mirror image, or being shown a picture of a cow and a milk bottle and then asked to match a chicken up to its equivalent produce. Nothing too taxing, but against a tight time limit it can be easy to mess up.

Bally had planned to release three versions, with each asking questions aimed at different audiences. However, after the game bombed in the US, its plans were cut short and any chance of a home conversion was scuppered.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

RIOT CITY

■ **Developer:** Westone ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up



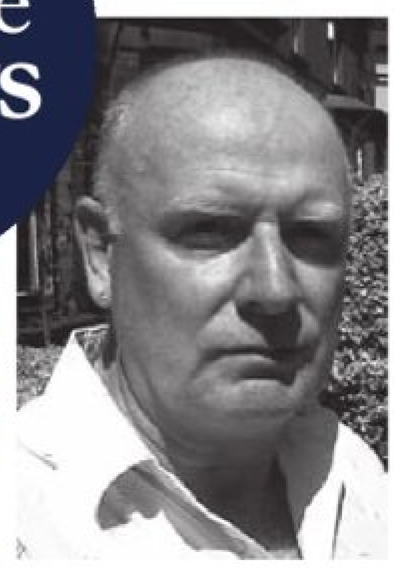
■ **This bland brawler** from Westone, best known for developing Sega's *Wonder Boy* series, sees two terribly dressed fighters named Paul and Bobby trying to reach the titular city to rescue Paul's girlfriend from a drug ring. Despite clearly trying its best to impersonate *Final Fight*, *Riot City* sadly has none of the character, charm or quality of Capcom's classic beat-'em-up. There are around five enemies to fight – four of these appear in the first stage – and stylistically the game can best be described as a colourful mess. Paul and Bobby's attacks are limited, there are no weapons in the game, and the peculiar way they stomp around the screen gives the impression that they were born sans elbows and knees. The only remotely entertaining thing about this sorry experience is discovering the ridiculously incongruous items stashed beneath oil drums, fuel containers and boxes. We found perfume bottles, smoking pipes and lollipops to be picked up.

THE ART OF AMIGA





Meet the experts



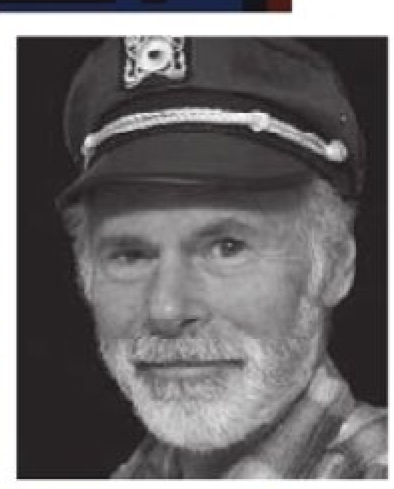
Name: Simon Butler
Age: 54
Occupation: Game artist/designer
Website: None
Favourite own work: *Nine Lives*, the game sucked but I enjoyed doing the graphics
Favourite Amiga game: *Flashback*, *Another World* and *Speedball 2*
Favourite Amiga artist: Garvan Corbett



Name: Stoo Cambridge
Age: 41 and a bit (no, not that bit, this bit)
Occupation: Creative consultant
Website: www.hobeka.com
Favourite own work: *Blobbit*
Favourite Amiga game: *Cannon Fodder*
Favourite Amiga artist: Don't have one



Name: Andrew Morris
Age: 21-ish
Occupation: (Now) Property developer
Website: None
Favourite own work: *Kid Chaos*
Favourite Amiga game: *The Chaos Engine*
Favourite Amiga artist: Dan Malone

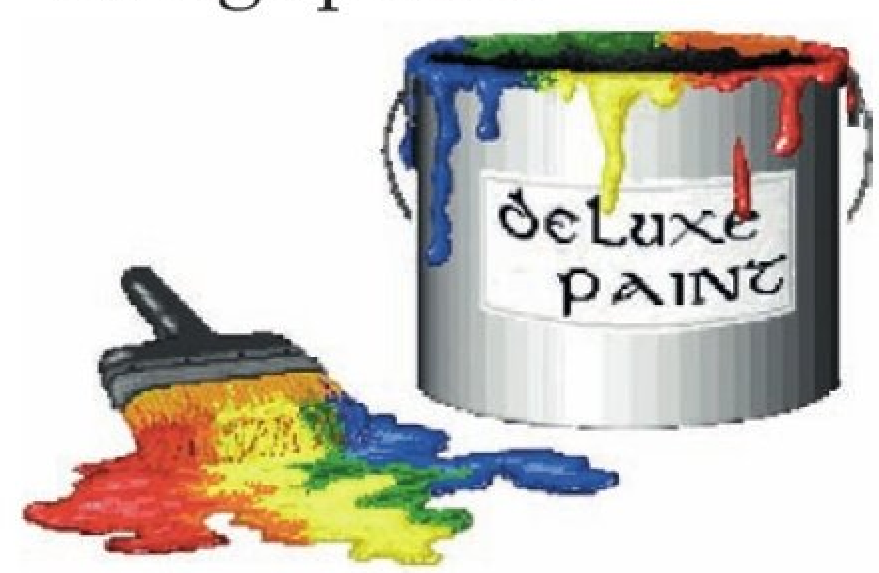


Name: Jim Sachs
Age: 62
Occupation: Software developer
Website: www.fish-byte.com
Favourite own work: *Defender Of The Crown II*
Favourite Amiga game: *Firepower*
Favourite Amiga artist: Brad Schenck



Name: Eric W Schwartz
Age: 39
Occupation: Freelance illustration and graphics
Website: http://www.sabrina-online.com
Favourite own work: My *Flip the Frog* cartoons, the 'Unsporting' *Aerotoon*, my recent musical Amiga tribute videos on YouTube
Favourite Amiga game: *Worms: The Director's Cut*
Favourite Amiga artist: Jim Sachs, among others

The Amiga set new standards for game graphics and computer art during its commercial lifetime, and has left a legacy of great artists. Andrew Fisher talks to some of the leading figures of the Amiga period



Did you have any formal training in art?

Simon Butler: None. I drew constantly from an early age but never saw it as a means to an end. There was a brief period when I considered doing comic art for a living.

Stoo Cambridge: No, I took a bit too long painting an exam picture which meant I got a 'U'. It didn't make much difference as I wanted to make games so exams were just a formality. I can recall studying *ZZAP! 64* quite a lot in Geography.

Andrew Morris: No, but I always enjoyed art as a child and in school.

Jim Sachs: No.

Eric Schwartz: I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts in illustration from the Columbus College of Art and Design.

How did you get started in computer art?

SB: I was called into Imagine Software by my best friend Steve Cain to help out on *Pedro's Garden*. I went back to college and then London to find a 'real' job, but I was called back to Liverpool to join the newly formed Denton Designs for a brief spell and then just found myself constantly working on games.

SC: Games on the VIC-20 made by a chap called Jeff Minter share the responsibility (or blame, some would say) of planting the idea into my head that I too could make games for a living. It wasn't until one Christmas when I received a C128 that my interest crossed over from thinking about it to doing it. After a few months of playing games I started to learn assembly language and played about with sprites and character sets, which then took me down the path of creating more graphics. I did have a game almost released which I'd hacked together using the *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* (*Battle Ball*) but alas, the publisher (Power House)

NUMBER CRUNCHING

5 the number of bit-planes a display is split into; a sixth bit-plane is used for the extra modes

8 hardware sprites with three colours and a transparent background colour; these can be 'paired' to give four 15-coloured sprites

32 number of colours in the standard screen mode

64 colours available in EHB (Extended Half-Brite) mode

84 pins on the upgraded Fat Agnus chip

200 height of the NTSC screen in pixels

256 height of the PAL screen in pixels

320 width of the standard screen

4096 total number of colours in the colour palette

2 MB Chip RAM on-board the Fatter Agnus

1280x512 maximum resolution of the AGA screen at 50Hz

16,777,216 total range of colours for the AGA machines

went under before it hit the shops. Fortunately they paid me the advance, which allowed me to buy the newly released Amiga 1000.

AM: I bought a ZX81 and progressed from there. When I was in school, I knew I wanted to design computer games and it came fairly naturally.

JS: I bought a Commodore 64 in the early Eighties, and started drawing on that. At first there were no drawing utilities, so I had to program the bytes directly. I would draw every pixel on graph paper, then laboriously type in the hexadecimal numbers into memory. When the Amiga came out, it revolutionised the process. Suddenly I had thousands of colours to work with, as well as tools.

ES: I have been drawing as long as I can remember, and have been interested in technology and computers nearly as long, so it was inevitable I would get into graphics. I wanted to use an Amiga ever since I saw the first magazine articles covering it in 1985.

> "I could put in intermediate pixels between two highly contrasting pixels to minimise the 'jaggies'. Later, I learned that there was a name for this – anti-aliasing"

What art utilities did you use on the Amiga – something commercial like *Deluxe Paint*, or specialised tools?

SB: *Deluxe Paint*. I found myself using a PC after a short stint but *DPaint* was still a fine piece of software even then. It took a long time for me to get pulled away onto other software simply because it was so good.

SC: I initially used *Deluxe Paint* which I pretty much stuck with until version three. It wasn't until I discovered a program called *Brilliance* that I switched. The main reason I switched was down to speed and functionality, which as a games artist is key, especially during deadlines and those last-minute updates that inevitably pop up five minutes before home time. For *Cannon Fodder* we used a custom tool for editing levels, which I recently discovered I still have the disc for. This tool let me import tiles, set up collisions and effectively gave anyone using it the means to create a game level. Back then most developers wrote their own tools for editing game stuff.

AM: *DPaint* – isn't that what everyone used? On some occasions we used bespoke utilities but *DPaint* was used for 99 per cent of what I did.

JS: *Graphicraft*, then *Deluxe Paint*, and then finally *Brilliance*.

ES: I used *Deluxe Paint* all the time back then for all sorts of things, along with software like *Disney Animation Studio* and *Moviesetter* for animation work. Later I used graphics software like *Personal Paint*, *Image FX*, and *Photogenics*, some of which are still comparable to the modern graphic software of today.



Did you work on the Atari ST as well, and what did you think of the rival machine?

SB: I did quite a bit on the ST, and must admit that even though it was the lesser machine, I had a soft spot for it. It seemed less 'convoluted', it was easier to use and although *Degas* (the art package) was by no means as powerful as *DPaint*, I was comfortable with it and did a lot of work I was very proud of. Amiga owners seemed to sneer at the Atari ST, so maybe it was just me sticking up for the underdog.

SC: Prior to my Sensible days I did a few games on both the Amiga and the ST. I would say I had a love/hate relationship with it. On one hand I thought it was undernourished graphically, I didn't like the limited 512 colour palette and much preferred the larger 4096 palette of the Amiga, but on the other hand it did work for the most part and was a lot simpler to code for.

AM: I did work on the ST – the game *Wrangler* (an update of our 8-bit game *Rollaround*) was designed for it and then ported to the Amiga. For some reason we did two separate versions of *Super Scramble Simulator* for the Amiga and ST. The Amiga was much better so we didn't really bother with the ST after that. I think we ported most of our Amiga games onto the ST, but they were very poor versions by comparison. We never compromised our Amiga games for the ST.

JS: I did some work porting graphics over to the ST. I found it very limiting.

ES: The ST was barely available at all in my area, so I had no first-hand experience with it.

Did the programmers/designers restrict what you could and could not do?

SC: At Sensible, no, we were all for innovation and I was quite involved technically with how some aspects of *Cannon Fodder* worked. I do think restrictions can help focus creativity as it goes some way in keeping things in check, otherwise you can go off on all sorts of tangents and lose sight of the end goal.

JS: Well, I was often the programmer/designer myself, but when working with other Amiga developers, I found them to be very open-minded and eager to try new things.

Which mode/palette did you prefer using, and were there any hardware tricks that helped you?

SC: Most of the games we did at Sensible were in 4bpp, which is a 16 colour-mode plus hardware sprites and the odd screen split when required. For example, on *Cannon Fodder* the parallax scrolling sequence shown before each mission



a The Psygnosis owl logo went through many revisions, but was usually the mark of a graphically excellent game.

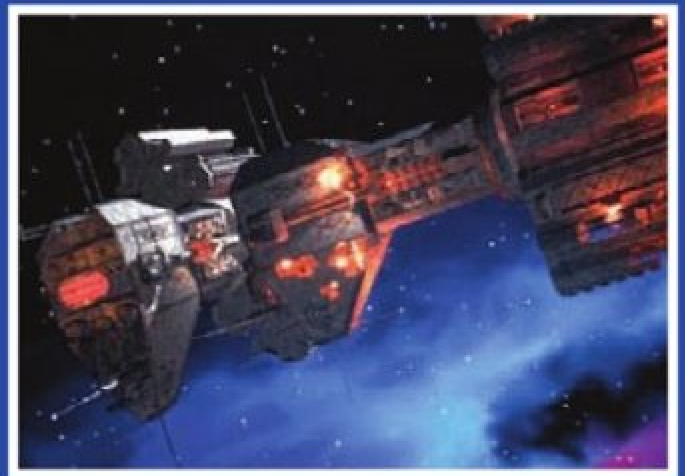
b This outstanding Amiga 1200 image is by Polish demo-scene artist Lazur.

c In addition to some truly stunning in-game visuals, *Shadow Of The Beast* also boasts gorgeous looking cut-scenes.



VISUALLY SPEAKING

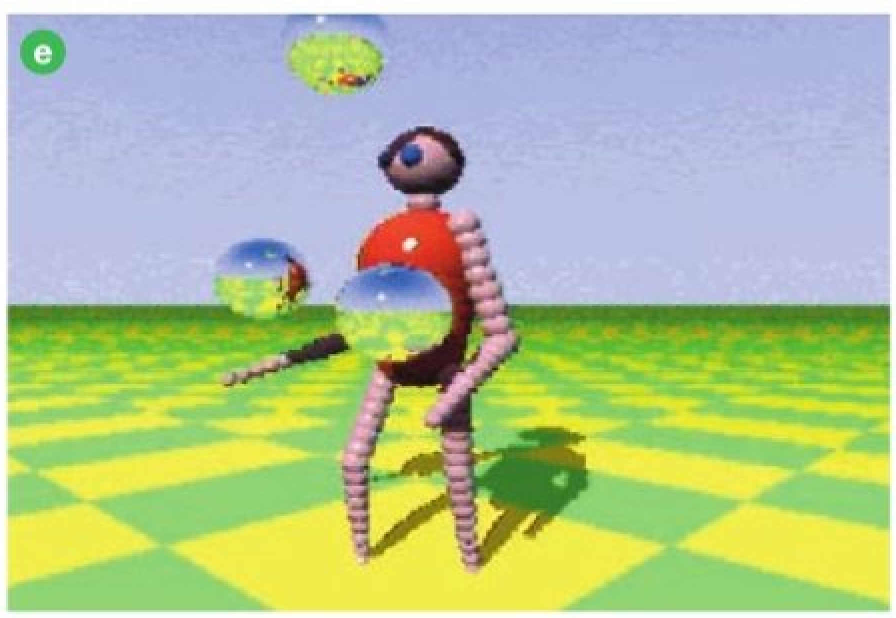
NewTek's Video Toaster was a combination of software and hardware allowing the generation of visual effects to match the quality of much more expensive systems. With up to four inputs and two outputs, the hardware acted as a 'genlock', synchronising the video signals to give a single picture. Its most obvious application was in laying graphics or text over a live TV signal. Many TV stations around the world used the Video Toaster for captions, menus and graphics. The most high profile programmes to use the system were submarine-based *seaQuest DSV* (all of the external shots of the craft were made with the Lightwave



3D software) and the entire first series of *Babylon 5*. NewTek remains in the hardware business, having won an Emmy for Technical Achievement in 1993 and moving to Windows-based hardware. James Cameron used the latest version of Lightwave for the hit movie *Avatar*.









was designed around the Amiga dual-play field mode. With the hardware we split the screen between each scrolling section, and swapped in a new palette and artwork which then gave us a new layer. The sky and the trees are one play-field and the mountains and foreground vegetation are another. I think there was about 40-50 colours used on those screens including the chopper, which was a 16-colour hardware sprite. The great thing about the Amiga was the hardware gave you the option to do tricks like that without loads of work, which for a designer is an open invitation to experiment.

AM: I think most games used the same mode – it allowed a decent amount of colours with a lower resolution, meaning the games would run quickly. I can't remember what that mode was called. I didn't expect the questions to be this geeky!

JS: Most of my Amiga graphics were in 320x200, 32-colour mode. I did a lot of experiments with colour-cycling, and made extensive use of it in my artwork. It was free animation, using no more bytes than those contained in the actual picture, yet could simulate glittering metal, moving water, and many other effects. When the Amiga 4000 came out, I did my last piece of Amiga artwork (Amiga Lagoon) in hi-res, 256-color mode.

ES: The 16 and 32 colour modes lent themselves to my more cartoony work, but I enjoyed experimenting with Hold And Modify modes and paint software, for different shading and transparency effects.

Did you have a particular style, and how long did it take to develop?

SB: My style is very cartoon-like, very bright and 'in-your-face', although if pushed it can vary quite extensively.

JS: My style was simply making things as realistic as possible. Since that's how I draw and paint anyway, it was just a matter of developing techniques to work around the resolution and palette limitations of the machines. This didn't take too long – a couple of weeks. I remember a conversation with Kellyn Beck when we were starting *Defender Of The Crown*. I was trying to explain how I could put in intermediate pixels between two highly contrasting pixels to minimise the 'jaggies'. A short time later I learned that there was already a name for this – anti-aliasing. Of course, now there are algorithms for it, but back then it was pixel-by-pixel.

SC: I think the style I have is as a direct result of wanting to retain a decent level of anti-aliasing which began when I was doing sprites and backgrounds on the C64.

AM: On the Amiga, the style I used changed to suite the game I was working on – *Lotus* is a very different looking game to *Kid Chaos*, for instance. I developed techniques such as anti-aliasing before they had a name but I was always learning new tricks with the tools that I had.

ES: There are variations and experiments, but mine is a cartoon style, inspired by the animated works that I grew up with. I like to believe that I'm still developing my style to this day, however slow that process takes.

> "The great thing was the hardware gave you the option to do tricks without loads of work, which for a designer is an open invitation to experiment"

What real word artists influenced your work?

SB: My graphical heroes existed in the comic world – Jack Kirby, Will Eisner, John Byrne, John Buscema, Moebius and many more.

SC: I like the old Seventies and Eighties airbursh art, especially some of the YES album covers created by Roger Dean. Geiger later inspired me, which you can see in the game I did called *The Executioner*.

JS: Norman Rockwell, N C Wyeth.

ES: I'm a fan of classic animation by Disney and the cartoon shorts directed by Chuck Jones. My *Flip The Frog* shorts were a tribute to that era.

How easy was it to animate graphics on the Amiga?

d — Garvan Corbett's artwork featured in several Psygnosis games; this is from the intro to *Barbarian*.

e — Eric Graham's Juggler animation showed the Amiga's ray tracing abilities, and Commodore acquired to rights to use it promotionally.

f — Jim Sachs has created some truly gorgeous imagery for Commodore's Amiga. This hi-res piece called Amiga Lagoon is easily one of our favourites.

SB: You have to remember that none of us were professional animators and fewer still were trained artists. We were all just making this stuff up as we went along. It's not like today where kids come into the industry from animation schools with a TV show or movie on their CV. We were really flying by the seat of our pants and there was no one to ask for advice and very few decent books for reference. The machine itself was seldom the problem, it was almost always the topic.
JS: It was incredibly easy. As far as I know, it's never been matched. Using *Aegis Animator* or *Disney Animation Studio*, we could sit around and brainstorm a project while animating our ideas in real-time. I wouldn't have any idea how to do that with modern machines, short of a full-blown video production.
ES: The great paint and animation software made it easy, though it was also easy for my ideas to get more and more ambitious, and outstrip the intended abilities of the hardware or software I had.

Did you prefer working on the moving graphics or static/presentation screens?
SB: I have always preferred the animation side of things because a bitmap, regardless of its complexity or quality, just sits there independent of your feelings of accomplishment. Sprites come to life from one moment to the next and even the biggest screw-up in the process is exciting in a way because you learn from your mistakes, or they perhaps suggest something you would not have thought of otherwise. The motion combined with the feeling that you have brought something to life is pretty good when you do it well.
SC: I like it all to be honest. The one thing I never really looked forward to was title screens.
JS: I had a lot of fun with both. Every day was an adventure in creating both the static screens and the animation effects.

Did you create the backgrounds as large elements or smaller tiles?
SC: Tiles, for sure. I usually started with some rough ideas either sketched or drawn direct to screen, which formed the basis of the look and feel of the artwork. Once the initial set of designs was done, I then moved on to drawing them within the limits of a tileset, which for something like *Cannon Fodder* was 16x16. The thing with *Cannon Fodder* I had to bear in mind was that each tile had a special 4x4 collision grid – which is how the soldiers in the game appeared to go in and out of small holes, go up and over grass clumps, and step into the water so smoothly.
AM: It depended on the game. Even if they were larger, they were often sub-divided into smaller portions by the copper. *Kid Chaos* used backdrops that were only four colours but appeared to be up to 64, *Lotus* used similar tricks.

How long did the average project take? Any late night sessions as deadlines loomed?
SB: The 'average' project took four to six months, or at least it should have done. *Universal Monsters* dragged on for a year at least, possibly a lot longer and, yes, there were a lot of late night and 'through-the-night' sessions. The Ocean office usually had at least one or two teams working through the night.

FIVE TO SEE



KNIGHTS OF THE CRYSTALLION

■ Created by the late Bill Williams, this is most notable for its use of the HAM – Hold And Modify – mode to give up to 4096 colours on-screen. Described as a 'culture simulator', players made their way through four different sub-games (an arcade maze, a board game, a card game and a 3D-based puzzle game) to earn crystals. These were used to power the knight's suit of armour and trade in the ultimate quest for the Crystallion (a crystal horse).



BANSHEE (AGA)

■ Core Design's vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up merged 1942 with steampunk to produce a stylish result. The level of detail in the backgrounds (with four very distinctive levels and variety in the terrain) and enemy animation is superb, and the sepia-toned presentation screens are brilliantly done.



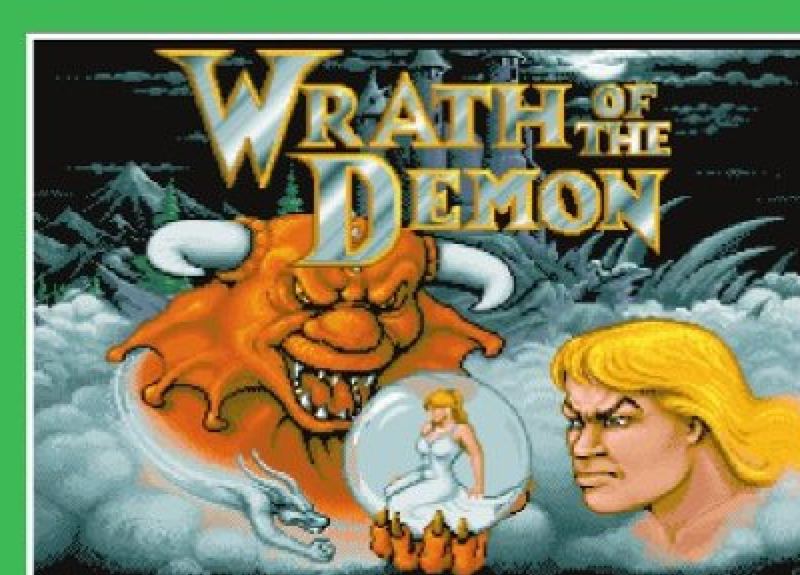
THE KILLING GAME SHOW

■ Part *Robocop*, part platformer, Psygnosis produced an unusual game with a dismembered human controlling a robot through a dangerous TV studio. The metallic and organic graphics are complemented by a clever effect – the rising OOZE, an organic liquid reflecting what's above.



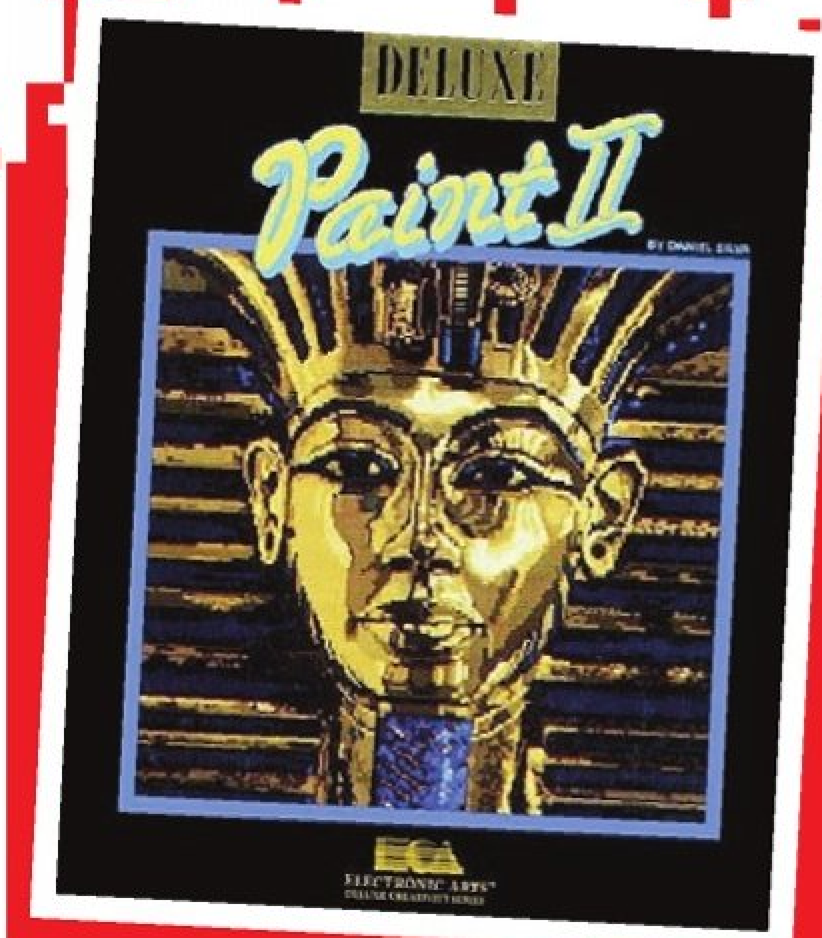
CADAVER

■ This was a tribute by the Bitmap Brothers to the classic isometric games of the Spectrum era. Karadoc the dwarf had to defeat the evil Necromancer, overcoming more than 150 rooms filled with enemies and object-based puzzles. It drew some criticism for its slow pace and difficulty, but still scored highly. Data-disk *The Payoff* and *Zero* magazine cover-disk *The Last Supper* both had four extra levels.



WRATH OF THE DEMON

■ Canadian developer Readysoft was best known for its conversions of the *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace* laserdisc games for Amiga, compressing the cartoon animation onto multiple floppy disks. But this arcade adventure had some impressive animation and cut-scenes of its own. The most memorable section was the horse riding, with its multiple levels of parallax scrolling.



FANCY TINT

"***Deluxe Paint* was** the best thing that ever happened in that period for artists," says Simon Butler. The utility started life as an in-house development tool for EA called Prism, programmed by Dan Silva. The ANIM format for animation stored the changes between frames, pre-dating MPEG compression. Commodore bundled the software with the Amiga, asking EA to create a new version for use with the AGA chipset. Unusually for the time, the buyer could pay more for a version without copy protection. There were versions for PC, Mac and Atari ST, as well as spin-off tools Deluxe Music and Deluxe Video.

Stoo recalls, "*DPaint* at that time was the de facto Amiga art package, but with every new version it seemed to be sacrificing speed for new features. When *Brilliance* came along it felt quick, it felt better and to top it all I could use it in exactly the same way as *DPaint*, one hand on the keyboard, the other on the mouse, the same keys and functions, just quicker and without the bloat."

Most know the myth that the hero of *Monkey Island* got his name from the file being saved as 'guy.brush' – which is simply not true, the file extension for the character created by Steve Purcell would actually have been '.bbm'. To see *DPaint* in action, check out the music video for Junior Senior's "Move Your Feet" by video artists Shynola.



» Deluxe Paint 4.5 catered for the higher resolutions on the Amiga 1200

SC: Too long and sometimes not long enough, there were quite a few late night sessions! The first day I started at Sensible I worked through to create the artwork for *Sim Brick*, I was so keen to make a good impression I forgot the time and well the rest is history, as they say. Creativity is a funny beast, you can spend all day going round in circles then just as you're about to close down and power off an idea will appear and pop up which inevitably you want to see through to the end, cue midnight oil burning, strong coffee and a cool breeze to keep you awake.

AM: In the days of the Amiga, if you couldn't get a game out in less than a year, it would be difficult to make any money out of it because piracy was so rife. Most games took around six to nine months. *Kid Chaos* was an exception. We spent two years developing it, the Amiga market was dying and it was pirated within days.

JS: I think *Ports Of Call* took me about two months, but that was a game that had already been completely finished, and just needed all new graphics. Working on *Defender Of The Crown* was pure hell. Several months of 20-hour days, with no days off. I treated myself to a nice nervous breakdown afterward.

ES: I remember a particular *Aerotoon* animation called 'Shuttlecock', in which I did all graphics and animation in a matter of hours in the computer lab at my college.

Were you ever involved in other aspects of creating the games – design, programming, and playtesting?

SB: I designed a lot of product right from the beginning of my career, basically because there was no one else to do it. I did more designs than ever saw the light of day, I playtested a lot of games and even wrote the music for one title.

SC: Although Jon Hare and Chris Yates were the main designers we all put our own ideas into the games. Generally we would have a direction and if it wasn't working we would try other things out until it did. We all became playtesters in that respect.

AM: I started in computers as a programmer - although back then, when you said you were a programmer, you were also an artist, a designer and a musician. For most of my professional career, I was a game designer and artist.

JS: Yes, all aspects. I created *Defender Of The Crown II* for the Amiga CD32 all alone.

Any memorable or funny stories about a particular game you worked on?

SC: Sensible was a great place to work and we



had a fantastic time which sadly you never really appreciate fully until you look back many years later. There are loads of stories I could tell, like shooting the *Sensible Golf* video in Regents Park with Carl from the band Madness.

JS: Many memories, but the pressure was usually so great that no one had much of a sense of humour during projects. Much of it is just a blur, like grabbing two hours of sleep under my desk each night while working on *Centurion*.

Were there big changes in working with the later AGA graphics modes, or CD-based games?

SC: CDTV was a mare, I do remember Chris Chapman frequently calling it a few choice words during the porting of Sensible Soccer. As for the AGA set we didn't really make use of it at the time. I personally would have been quite happy to do an enhanced version of something like *Cannon Fodder* or even *Mega-Lo-Mania* using the extra graphics modes. The nearest I got to enhancing some of the art was when I converted the *Sensible Soccer* graphics to the Jaguar. Funnily enough I used an A1200 to do the artwork and recall the sheer delight of having what seemed like a zillion and one colours to choose from.

JS: I only did the one piece of AGA artwork, for the Digital Creations *Brilliance* ad campaign. I was working on a computer game version of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* in AGA when Disney pulled the plug.

Has the experience been important to your career after the Amiga?

SC: For sure, yes, without the Amiga and ground-breaking software like *DPaint* my career in the games industry would not have followed the path it did.

AM: Europress wanted 'The *Lotus* Team' to develop their next *Rally* game and that was very big for us. The *Rally* games were our most successful and

> "I remember a particular Aerotoon animation, in which I did all graphics and animation in a matter of hours in the computer lab at my college"

g The *Lotus* games featured all sorts of clever little effects including anti-aliasing.

h The *Boing Ball* demo debuted at the Winter CES in January 1984, and was often used to demonstrate the multitasking capabilities of the Amiga.

i The Amiga's enhanced colour palette ensured that the conversion of *Space Ace* looked amazingly accurate.

j Another impressive example of Jim Sachs' digital work. This was used in the application *Amiga Dealer*.

profitable and made all the hard work on the Amiga – much of which was very poorly paid – worthwhile in the end.
JS: I doubt if the experience can ever really be equalled. The field was brand-new and wide open. I couldn't wait to get up every morning to create effects that no human eyes had ever beheld on a computer screen.

Whose Amiga artwork did you admire?
SB: Dan Malone, but I always liked Garvan Corbett who I was fortunate enough to meet at an abortive interview with Psygnosis. He was a really nice guy who was happy to show me his work and talk sprites and animation for 30 minutes or so. His stylised work on *Barbarian* combined with the really cool animations impressed me greatly.
SC: A few that spring to mind are Ste Pickford, Dan Malone, Rico Holmes, Simon Butler, Henk Nieberg – I could go on.
AM: Dan Malone was very good – particularly *The Chaos Engine,* but also *Speedball II*.
JS: Brad Schenk. In fact, he's still doing some great artwork on the PC.
ES: Jim Sachs. I've consistently been amazed at the level of realism he has been able to create even with extremely limited palettes.

Do you still own an Amiga and would you ever do new artwork for it?
SC: I do actually have a few of them still, including my original A1000, which I have to say is my favourite. As for doing new artwork for use on an Amiga, I can't see that happening any time soon.
ES: I still have an Amiga 4000 tower that I use frequently, along with an "Amiga-compatible" Pegasos PPC system running MorphOS.
JS: I still have every Amiga I ever owned. Amiga 1000, 500, 2000, 2500, 4000, CDTV, CD32 (even a 'breadboard' model). But no, wouldn't consider doing any new artwork on them. Time marches on.
SB: I never owned an Amiga. I used machines provided for me by clients or the ones in-house at Ocean. I love the fact that the indie and demo scenes are so vibrant now, perhaps if someone makes me a decent enough offer I'll take them up on it. Any takers?
AM: I have two or three Amigas. I often think about doing graphics again for the Amiga – or even the Commodore 64. It would be fun to do something, but I can't think how it would ever happen. We are hoping to relaunch some of our old Amiga games on iOS and Android. That might be the closest I come to revisiting those happy days.

NAMING THE CHIPS

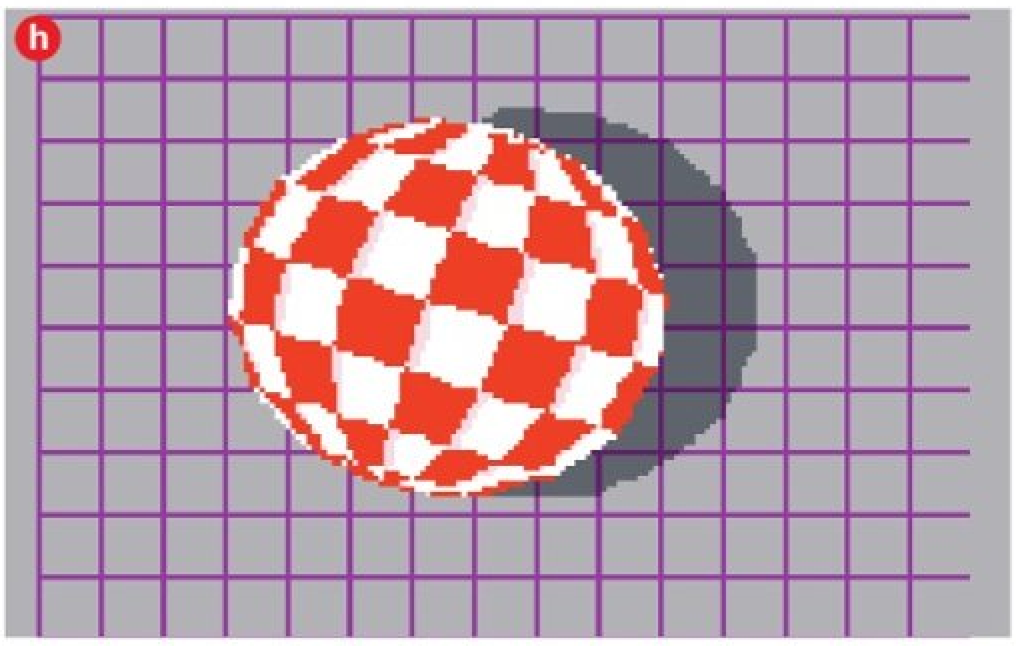
The OCS (Original Chip Set) had female names in a tradition started by designer Jay Miner, with the Amiga prototype named after his wife Lorraine. Paula (audio) was originally Portia, and Denise (graphic timing and sprites) was initially called Daphne, short for Display Adapter. Agnus (Address GeNerator UnitS) had 512K of onboard memory and two special features. The blitter moved large blocks of graphics quickly. The copper (co-processor) allowed rapid changes of graphic mode, colour or sprite position timed to the screen update.

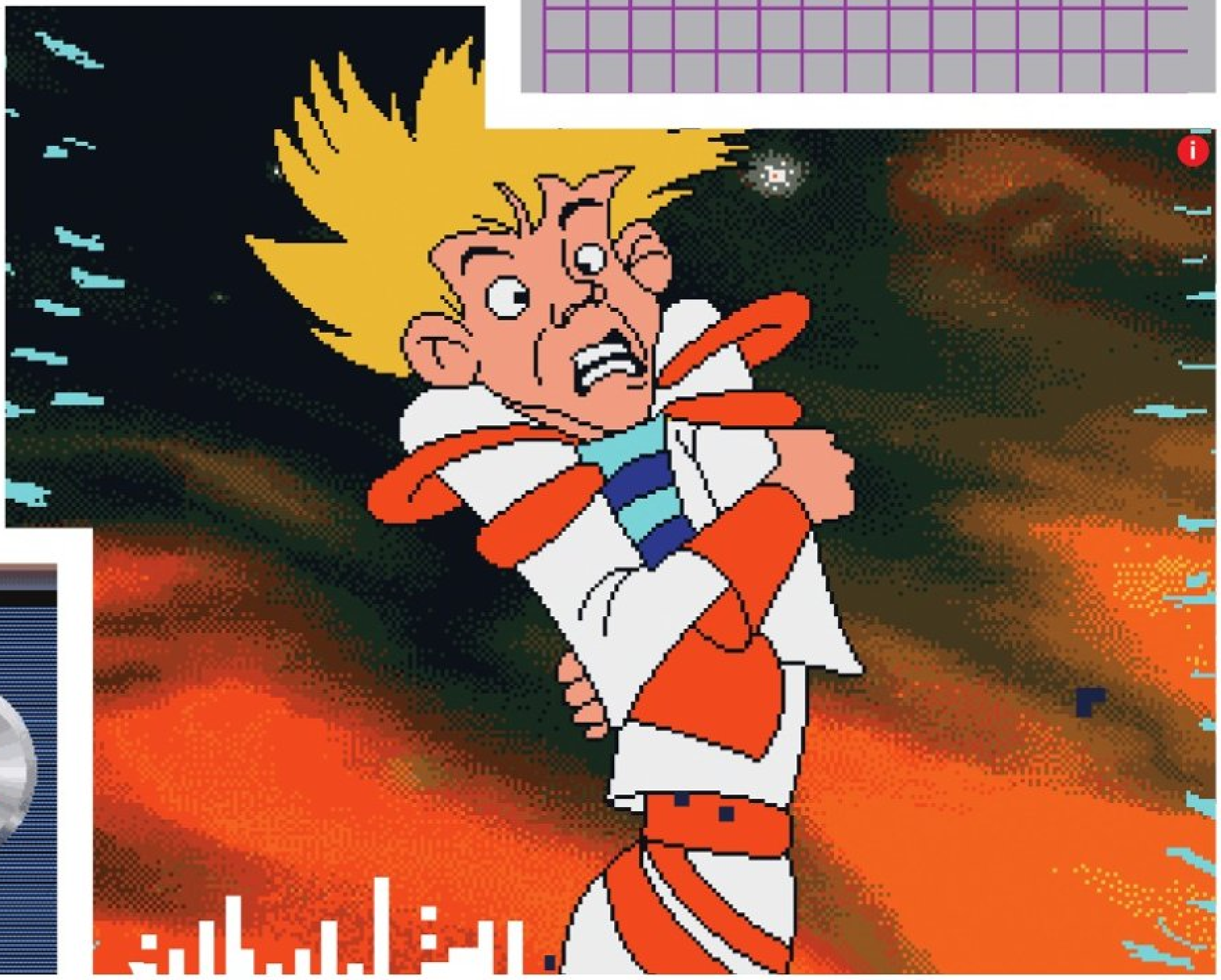
The Enhanced Chip Set of Super Agnus and HiRes Denise had up to 2MB of onboard memory, allowing the blitter to move bigger objects and adding new graphic modes. AGA (Advanced Graphic Architecture) in the CD32, Amiga 1200 and 4000 replaced Agnus with Alice and Denise with Lisa. These new chips gave more colours and smoother scrolling, but PC graphics were already higher res.

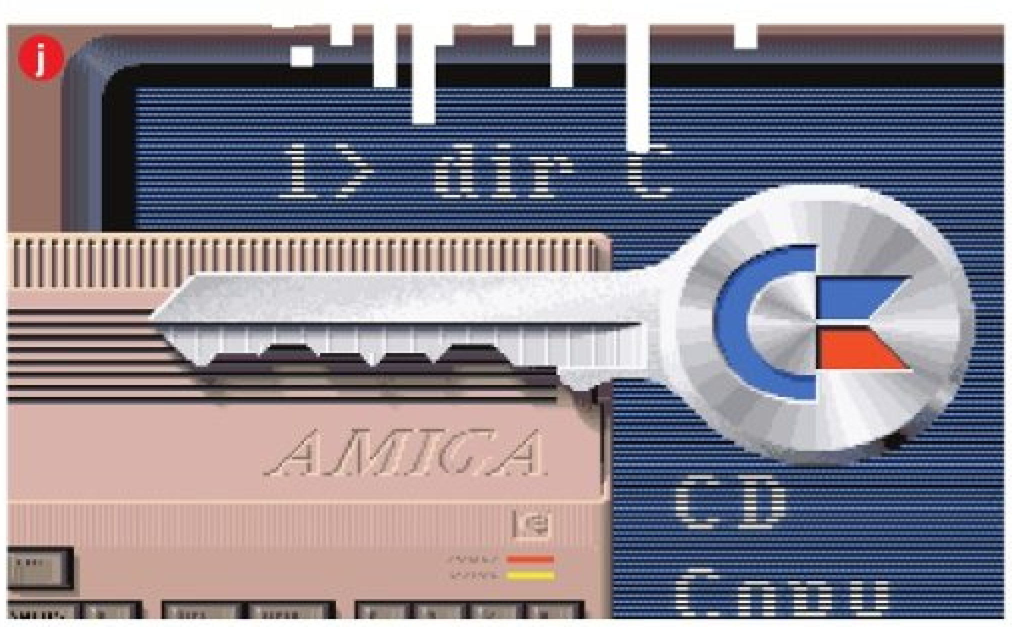


» Denise and Paula from the Original Chip Set







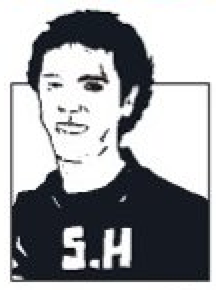


Special thanks to Daniel Kürsten of the Amiga Graphics Archive – http://amiga.lychesis.net – for his help with this article.

First Samurai

HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE LAST NINJA OR THE SECOND SHINOBI

» RETROREVIVAL



» COMMODORE 64
» VIVID IMAGE
» 1992

A late arrival in the Commodore 64's life, this hack-and-slash game from Vivid Image proved that there was still plenty of zeal in the beige bread-bin.

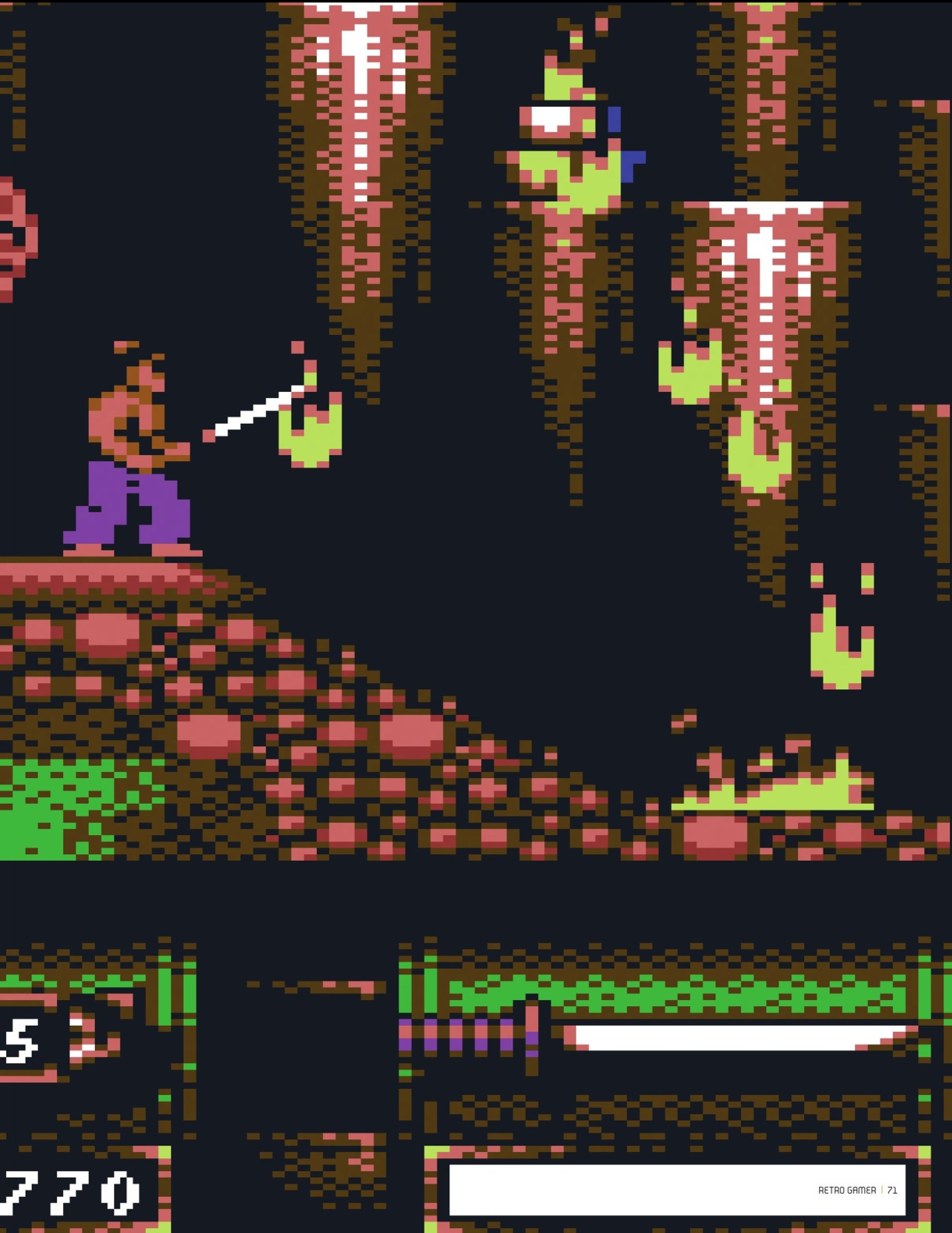
First Samurai saw you on a mission to exact vengeance on the demon that killed your master – which would surely make you the second samurai, would it not? Anyway, after the fight, the demon uses his powers to escape to a far flung future, thinking he would be beyond any sort of reprisal. He was wrong, as before his death your master summons a wizard to help his student follow the demon. What consequently follows is your typical martial arts videogame scenario, whereby someone well trained in an ancient form of combat finds themselves fighting in a setting far removed from their usual surroundings.

Visually the C64 version of *First Samurai* is striking, and this is largely thanks to a clever graphic engine created by John Twiddy (who helped establish Vivid Image) that saw its graphics – by the talented Raff Cecco – drawn for the ST and Amiga and then transferred down to the C64.

But while your samurai warrior animates with a wonderful sense of fluidity, it's the controls that prove the real standout. You initially begin with fists and feet for protection, but absorbing the souls of your fallen foes gradually fills a meter that gifts you a nifty samurai sword. Unlike most other games of its ilk, where your attack repertoire comprised of a paltry number of rigid-looking moves, *First Samurai* made you feel like you were waving a sword around by giving you plenty of control over your blade and adding a nifty swoosh graphic effect – we're suckers for those.

Aside from the stunning visuals and tight controls, there were also a number of excellent little gameplay mechanics too. Your samurai could stick to walls like Spider-Man, call upon the wizard to circumvent dangers and obstacles, and could even set regeneration points using handy pots peppered around the level – very useful, as *First Samurai*'s perpetually re-spawning enemies provide absolutely zero respite.

A late great, it's true proof that the C64 could still play with the big boys during its twilight years. *


770

THE CLASSIC GAME

DISCWORLD

Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* is nothing short of a literary phenomenon, and having his comic fantasy universe brought to computers and consoles was simply inevitable. The mid-Nineties may well have been the twilight years for point-and-click adventure gaming, but with a solid development team, a big-name publisher, and the budget to hire some incredible talent for the making of the game, *Discworld* ended up being nothing short of a classic. Craig Ritchie revisits Ankh-Morpork to deal with dragons, secret brotherhoods, bar room brawls and much, much more.

DIBBLER

Although he only plays a very small role in the game, Cut-Me-Own-Throat Dibbler is such a favourite that he'd definitely be missed if he weren't included.



RIDCULLY

Archchancellor Mustrum Ridcully, one of the few faculty members capable of being sensible from time to time, helps Rincewind get things under way.



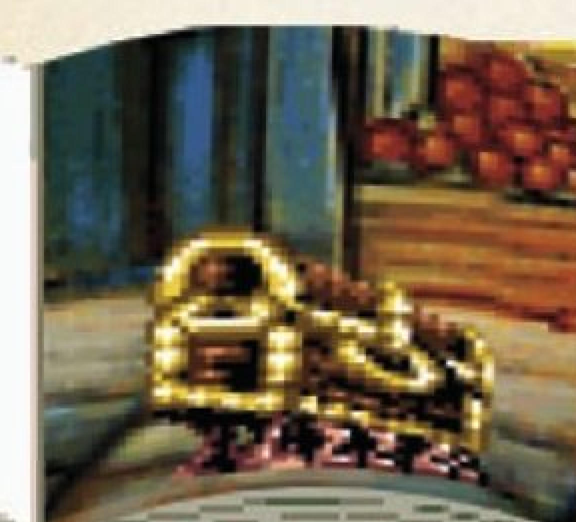
THE LIBRARIAN

Everyone's favourite primate was accidentally turned into an orangutan – NOT monkey – and has since refused all offers to have him turned back.



THE LUGGAGE

Although not much of a talker, the enchanted and ever-loyal item-carrying luggage is almost always at Rincewind's side. Mind your fingers.



THE DRAGON

In true *Discworld* fashion, the dragon, so central to the plot, is not entirely as one would imagine a scaly, giant, fire-breathing monster to be.



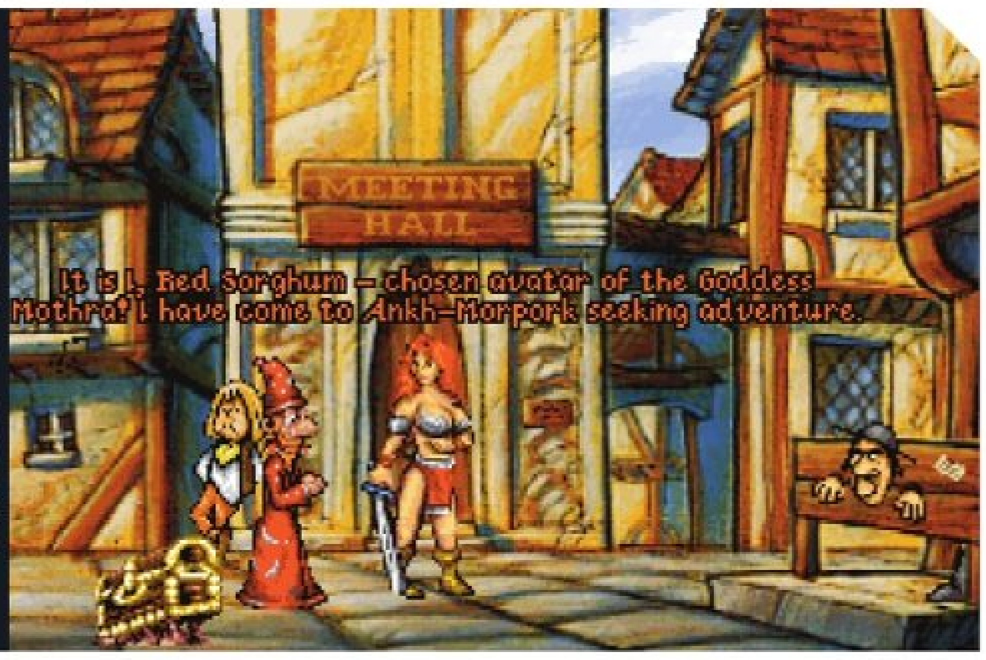
RINCEWIND

As the recurring protagonist introduced to readers in the very first novel, the red-dress-wearing one was an obvious choice for the game's lead character.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS

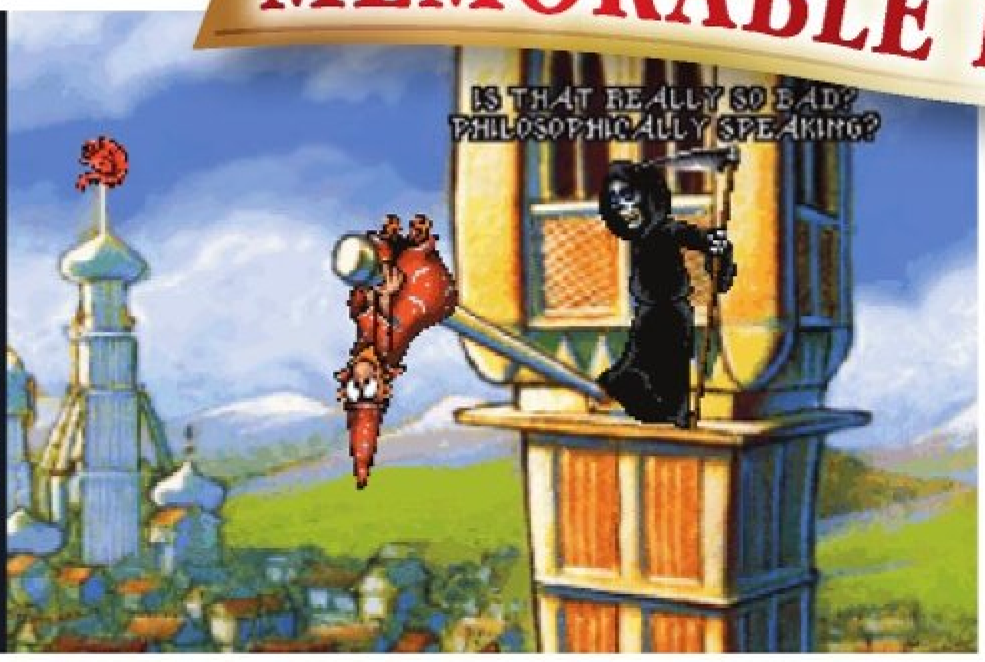
WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



You can feel the love

This was the first graphical *Discworld* game – it was preceded by an older text adventure – and the developers definitely didn't muck about with the licence. Playing the game gives the sense that it was made by a team who truly loved the source material and understood what fans would want. Locations are beautifully drawn, the characters' personalities are true to the books and brilliantly voiced, the dialogue and small touches are genuinely funny, and the whole thing is close enough to being straight out of Pratchett's mind that it fits in snugly with the rest of the *Discworld* canon.

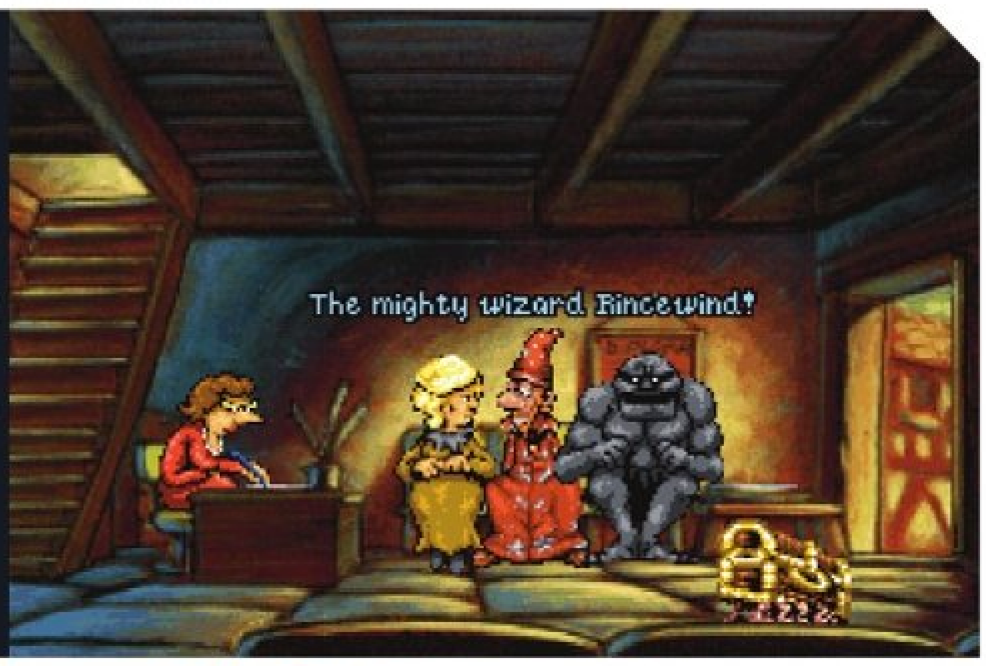
BEST CHARACTER



It's all about Death

It's undoubtedly the characters of the *Discworld* universe that give it so much of its appeal, and a host of the best crop up here. One of Terry Pratchett's most popular was his vision of Death, who appears in this game true to form and with the same morbid charm he has in the books. Again, well-written and perfectly voiced dialogue in genuinely funny moments make Death's presence in the game as entertaining and effective as he is in the novels. Only he can add so much foreboding clout to a casual utterance of the phrase, "I'll see you soon."

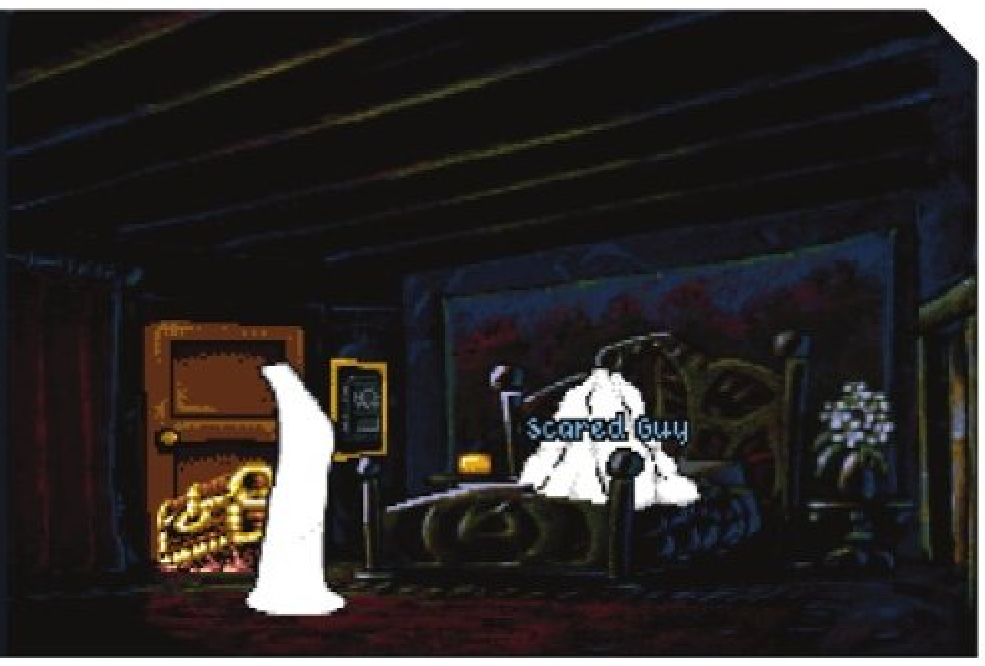
BEST ACTING



Bring out the Python

A title that includes the likes of Tony Robinson, Rob Brydon and the late Jon Pertwee among its supporting cast is going to have the bar set pretty high when the time comes to voice the main character. The solution? Get the immortal talents of Monty Python alumnus Eric Idle to bring Rincewind to life. Idle's voice acting skills, sense of humour and understanding of Pratchett's world, together, of course, with his excellent deliveries, fit the game perfectly. Even if we did hear the line, "Did anyone get the number of that donkey cart?" a few too many times…

BEST PUZZLE



Say what you see

Despite suffering from more than its share of annoying try-every-item-with-every-other-item 'puzzles', there were still a few inspired moments that rewarded attentive players. We really liked the way the characters in the Broken Drum were affected by Rincewind's traipse back in time – especially the way a particularly petrified patron describes to the player how a ghost visited him in the night and stole his jewellery box. Of course, he's actually hinting at exactly what needs to be done in the past to get some essential items, but first-time players would have no idea of this until later in the game.

BEST LOCATION



A city guide to Ankh-Morpork

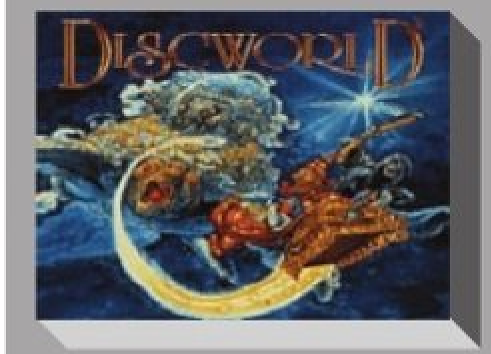
The city of Ankh-Morpork is brilliantly realised through great graphics and a multitude of *Discworld* characters adding charm to each area. The Shades, the Patrician's Palace, the Broken Drum and more are all here, as are a few choice locations outside of the city. It's Unseen University that gets the nod, though. Playing host to the likes of Archchancellor Mustrum Ridcully, geriatric wizard Windle Poons, the orangutan librarian and, of course, the line-up of bumbling faculty members, UU is legendary in the *Discworld* series, and the developers did an excellent job of bringing it to our screens.

STANDOUT MOMENT



The imp effect

Getting hold of the imp as part of the requirements for constructing a dragon-locating device in the first act of the game is a great moment that is also a direct reference to how Pratchett worked film and photograph 'technology' into the novels. Imps reside in cameras, painting whatever they see at super high speed, and an alchemist living in Ankh-Morpork just happens to have one. Rincewind duly 'liberates' the imp by distracting the alchemist – with popcorn, no less – before capturing the little bugger again. With a worm attached to a piece of string. Somehow.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** PC, MAC, PSONE, SATURN
- **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
- **DEVELOPER:** TEENY WEENY GAMES / PERFECT ENTERTAINMENT
- **RELEASED:** 1995
- **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

What the press said… ages ago



IGN, 7/10

"The game is absolutely hilarious, and is worth it almost for the humour alone. Eric Idle really is a treat. It's challenging and long and… well, it's slow. If you can sit through the long load times, it has a lot to offer."

What we think

While the game received praise for its production values, great voice acting and its faithfulness to the source material, the criticisms about illogical puzzles and that the console ports could have run a little smoother are right on the money. Still, it's a true genre classic and an absolute essential for Pratchett fans.

SLIGHTLY MAGIC

After upsetting a few folks with his satirical music biz sim Rock Star Ate My Hamster, Colin Jones decided to play it safer for his final game, an enchanting cartoon action-adventure. Stuart Hunt caught up with Colin to find out more

Retro Gamer: How did the idea behind *Slightly Magic* come about?
Colin Jones: I'd finished *Rock Star Ate My Hamster*, and to be honest I was looking to have another successful game, but something a little bit different too. I had ideas for *Rock Star*-style games, but I wanted something a bit safer. It had been banned, and I saw what I thought was a number one game relegated to number two in the charts. I had a few ideas that involved characters changing as the game progressed, *Slightly Magic* being one of them. I took a bunch of these ideas to Codemasters and *Slightly Magic* came out on top – which was lucky, because it was my favourite too.

RG: *Slightly Magic* is credited to your development company, Astonishing Animations. Can you tell us about this venture?
CJ: I thought that I wanted to get into animation; what I didn't realise is that I was already in animation with my computer games. Also, when your name is Colin Jones it doesn't instantly stand out from the crowd. I'd realised that teams were important too – you couldn't produce a quality game on your own. When I left the games industry, or when the games industry left me, Astonishing just sort of died a natural death, although I did produce some TV animation for the Welsh fourth channel, S4C. Other things – music, self-awareness, learning – were calling.

RG: How do you feel about *Slightly Magic* being called a *Dizzy* clone by many reviewers at the time, and was *Dizzy* an inspiration?
CJ: Dizzy was great. Is he still around? He'd work just as well on today's machines and wouldn't be at all out of place. Bring back Dizzy! We love you! Yes, *Dizzy* played a role. I thought *Slightly Magic* would appeal to a slightly older audience, but not that much older. And, of course, it gave me an excuse to do some more writing.

RG: *Slightly Magic* was renowned for its lovely cartoon visuals. What can you tell us about the graphics?
CJ: I think Chris Graham and Keith Ross worked on the graphics. Codemasters managed to find the best graphic artists to work with. They knew exactly what I wanted. We used 8x8 pixel blocks to build up the backgrounds. Did Slightly colour over the blocks as he passed over, or did he take the background colour? I can't remember. That would be the only decision to make: whether to let the main character change colour or colour over the background blocks as he passed over them. I didn't like the flickery games that repeatedly coloured the characters and the background. Recognise a limitation and work with it.

RG: *Slightly Magic* is packed with different characters. How did you come up with them?
CJ: Just asked myself for ideas, plucked them out of the ether.

RG: Did Codemasters consider turning *Slightly Magic* into a *Dizzy* game at any point?
CJ: Never. They were very keen for me to do the best the way I wanted to. They'd playtest the game to death and let me know if there was a problem and so on, but they didn't interfere creatively at all. They actually were great.





IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- » **DEVELOPER:** ASTONISHING ANIMATIONS
- » **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, C64, CPC, AMIGA, ATARI ST
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE ADVENTURE



NEW TO SLIGHTLY MAGIC? READ HERE FIRST

IF YOU'VE PLAYED any of the main *Dizzy* games you'll know exactly what to expect with *Slightly Magic*, as it's a cartoon adventure romp in a similar mould. You assume the role of Slightly, an inquisitive young wizard who finds himself in a bit of hot water after his wizard uncle leaves him alone in his castle. After messing around with things he shouldn't, a princess ends up being kidnapped by a dragon and he is left to clean up the mess before anyone realises what's happened. Like in the *Dizzy* games, Slightly must explore a massive map, find the appropriate objects and work out how they will aid him on his quest. What makes it unique, though, is that by collecting certain ingredients Slightly can cast spells over the characters in the game, and even turn himself into other creatures, such as a flea, a bird and a fish, to complete his quest.



» [C64] Many C64 owners and reviewers were left less impressed by *Slightly Magic*. To be fair, it isn't a great port. It's a tired-looking conversion and not a patch on the superb Spectrum offering.

RG: How long did *Slightly Magic* take to write, and were there any issues you were forced to circumvent during its development?
CJ: Too long. Computer games always took too long to write. There was no way to get around it. How many games came out on time? Late nights, coffee… Nothing could get a game out on time. Do games come out on time now? If they do there's something wrong, let me tell you. The only problem would be too many ideas to squeeze into an 8-bit machine really. But squeeze you did, because you knew you might not get another chance.

> **"How many games came out on time? Late nights, coffee… Nothing could get a game out on time"**

RG: Do you think *Slightly Magic* was pushing the Spectrum from a technical perspective?
CJ: Well, we had a bit of speech and a heck of a lot of gameplay – more than you could possibly fit into a ZX Spectrum. I don't think there was anything else you could do with the Spectrum. It was just good enough for genius. Then you squeeze a bit more in.

RG: How did you come up with the magic mechanic that transformed Slightly and characters into other things?
CJ: I thought it would be so cool to have the character cast spells on himself and on others. So I just had to do it, had to make it work. I knew that the market was coming to an end; change was in the air. Any ideas I had and was allowed to run with, I just had to make them work. So what was the most elegant way to make it work, but to keep it manageable? Set the limits of what could be changed, when, and how.

RG: What was your reaction to all the positive press the game received on its release?
CJ: Very pleased. Thrilled, really. It's always nice when someone recognises your work. We all want to be loved, don't we?

RG: Finally, can you tell us your fondest memory of working on the game?
CJ: You know, I'd done everything I wanted to do. I finally got to see those cartoons moving on screen that I'd dreamt about when I saw my first games console. Looking back, it was exactly what I needed to do for my last game. It's very satisfying to see that now. Now I'm working with music, stories and techniques to change lives. I've got a new music CD out and an incredible technique to change your experience of the world. **www.colin-jones.com** for those who are interested.

SLIGHTLY SPOOKY

A COMBINATION OF slick animation, colourful cartoon graphics and a £2.99 price sticker saw the Speccy version of *Slightly Magic* garner some lofty scores from games magazines upon its release. *Your Sinclair* clearly loved it the most, awarding it 94% and even going so far as to brand it "better than the *Dizzy* games" because of the addition of spells. Pleased with all the praise it received, Colin got to work on a sequel, *Slightly Spooky*, but sadly it never saw release.

"Crikey, how did you find out about that?" answers Colin when we quiz him on why the sequel mysteriously vanished like a rabbit in a hat. "*Slightly Spooky* was a great game, pushed all the right buttons. It was very imaginative and fun to play. As I remember, it made it onto the Amiga but was never released. The industry was dying, or should I say contracting. Something new emerged, of course, but it was never the same again. Sorry about that. I did my best. *Slightly Spooky* got shelved. Forever."





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ROCK STAR ATE MY HAMSTER (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, CPC, AMIGA
YEAR: 1989

GRANGE HILL: THE COMPUTER GAME
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, CPC
YEAR: 1987

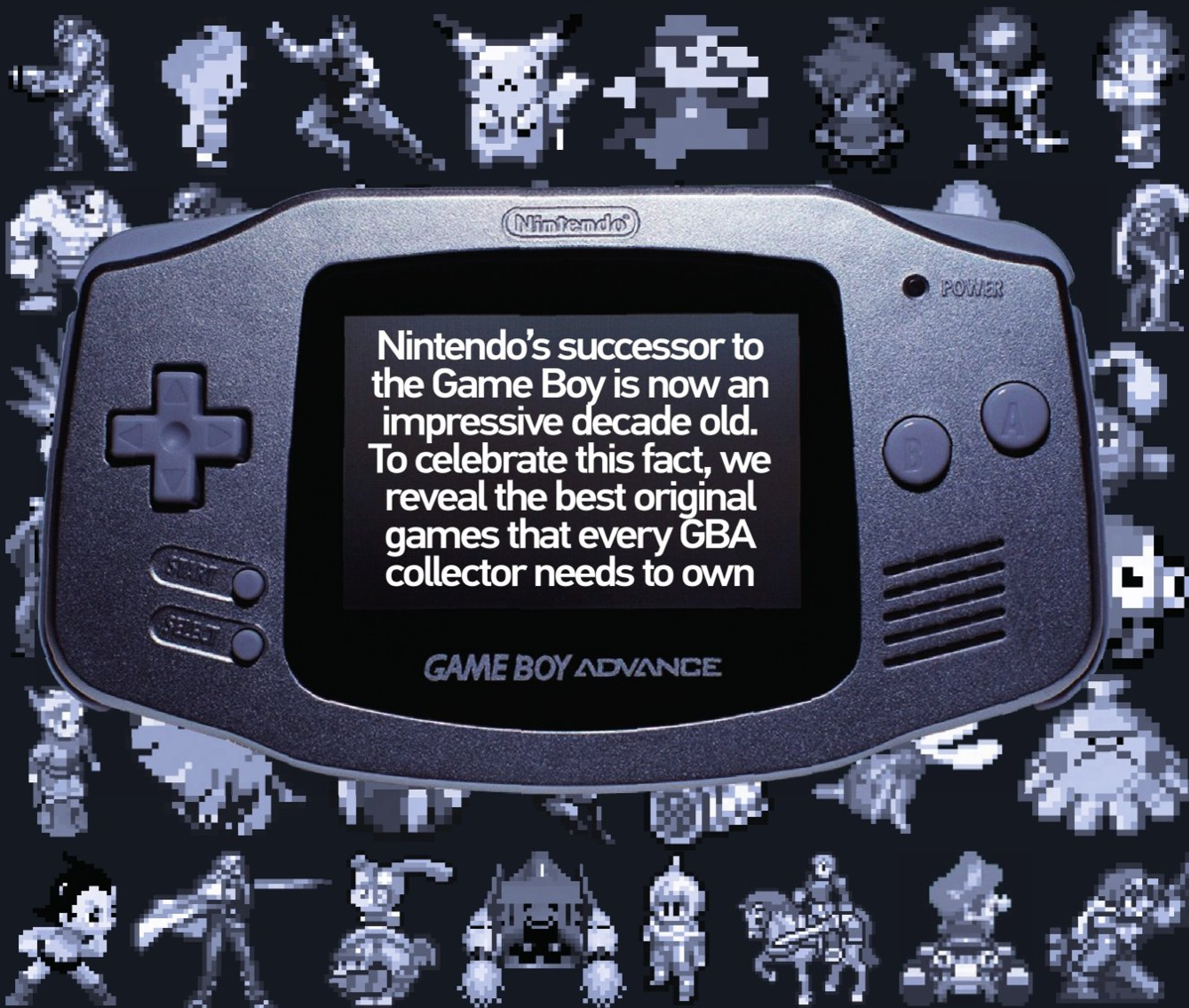
iD
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1986



» [Spectrum] The graphics and level of detail in *Slightly Magic* are superb. If it isn't one of the best-looking games on the Speccy then it's certainly the loudest.

THE BEST GBA GAMES

(THAT WEREN'T REMAKES)



Nintendo's successor to the Game Boy is now an impressive decade old. To celebrate this fact, we reveal the best original games that every GBA collector needs to own

NINJA COP

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Hudson Soft | **Alternatives:** *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell, Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts, Mega Man Zero*



■ THIS SUPERB EFFORT from Hudson Soft is easily one of the best handheld action games to be found on Nintendo's powerful little handheld. Playing like a steroid-injected cross between Sega's *Shinobi* and Capcom's *Bionic Commando*, it's an amazingly fast-paced game that boasts meticulous level design, beautifully animated sprites and an extremely challenging yet always fair difficulty level. In fact, the only real downside to *Ninja Cop* is that it was printed in such low quantities that it's now getting hard to find a copy at a reasonable price.

Interesting Fact: In a rare oversight, *Ninja Cop* doesn't allow you to delete a saved game.





READER OPINION

"Metroid Fusion. Utterly compelling with a great plot and classic gameplay"
– nakamura

"Mario Kart gets played everyday on my GBA SP. It's a long old commute and I just want to get grade A on everything"
– bensonrad

CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Konami | **Alternatives:** *Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon, Harmony Of Dissonance, Shaman King: Master Of Spirits*



■ ALL OF THE GBA's *Castlevania* games are of a high standard, but the third, *Aria Of Sorrow*, is the highlight of the trilogy. Introducing new hero Soma Cruz, it's most noted for its innovative new gameplay mechanic called Tactical Soul, which allows Soma to steal the souls of defeated enemies and utilise their skills in a wide variety of ways.

While it continued to recycle main enemy sprites from past games, *Aria Of Sorrow* featured plenty of gobsmacking boss battles and presented players with another labyrinthine castle to negotiate. We'd advise you to seek out the *Castlevania Double Pack*, which also features the enjoyable *Harmony Of Dissonance*.

Interesting Fact: Soma Cruz went on to appear in the DS sequel, *Dawn Of Sorrow*.



MARIO KART SUPER CIRCUIT

Year Released: 2001 | **Developer:** Intelligent Systems | **Alternatives:** *Racing Gears Advance, Moto Racer Advance, Karnaaj Rally*



■ IT'S RATHER INTERESTING that a series that started off life on a home console has always fared better as a handheld game. *Mario Kart Super Circuit* is a masterful little racing game that captures all the spirit of the original SNES game – the Super Nintendo tracks are actually included as an unlockable – and adds plenty of new mechanics, making it perfect for portable play.

Up to four players could race around the marvellously designed tracks, and the focus, as in the original *Super Mario Kart*, was on racing, with some of the new tricks introduced in *Mario Kart 64* ported back to the old-style gameplay.

Interesting Fact: The removal of the feather power-up, which allows you to hop higher, makes some of the SNES tracks harder to play.



KURU KURU KURURIN

Year Released: 2001 | **Developer:** Eighting | **Alternatives:** *Denki Blocks, Dr Mario & Puzzle League, Mr Driller 2, Mario Vs Donkey Kong*



■ WE HAVE A strong love/hate relationship with Eighting's fiendishly challenging puzzle game, but no matter how cruel it can be, it keeps us coming back for more. Taking control of an ever-rotating blade, which is actually a helicopter-like device called a Helirin, you must guide it through some hellishly designed mazes that will test both your sanity and reflexes to their very limits.

The true beauty of *Kuru Kuru Kururin*, though, is that the difficulty is so finely tuned that you never blame the game for sending you crashing into a wall for the umpteenth time, because it's always down to your own clumsy incompetence. A Japan-only sequel followed a year later, but we prefer the original.

Interesting Fact: Eighting used to make plenty of hardcore shoot-'em-ups, including *Battle Garegga* and *Sokyugurentai*.



POKÉMON PINBALL: RUBY & SAPPHIRE

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Jupiter | **Alternatives:** *Pinball Of The Dead, Sonic Pinball Party, Muppet Pinball Mayhem*



JUPITER'S SEQUEL TO its popular Game Boy Color game shares many of the same mechanics as its predecessor, but on a far grander scale. The Catch 'Em and Evolution modes are far superior due to the better thought out tables, while Travel mode enables you to visit areas that harbour different types of Pokémon. While it's not a dramatic overhaul of the original game, it's by far the best pinball title on the Game Boy Advance and is a must-own for high-score chasers and *Pokémon* fans alike.

Interesting Fact: Jupiter is responsible for Nintendo's range of Pokémon Mini games.



METAL SLUG ADVANCE

Year Released: 2004 | **Developer:** Noise Factory | **Alternatives:** *Gunstar Super Heroes, Alien Hominid, Contra Advance: The Alien Wars EX*



ASIDE FROM AMAZING-LOOKING visuals, *Metal Slug Advance* also happens to be a cracking run-and-gun game and a worthy entry in the series. Easily replicating the detailed sprites of the Neo Geo games, *Metal Slug Advance* offers challenging levels, some insanely tough bosses, a life bar to replace the lives found in previous games, and an all-new card-collecting element.

Interesting fact: An underwater level was originally intended, but was dropped at the last moment.





ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Treasure/Hitmaker | **Alternatives:** *Gradius Advance, Iridion II, R-Type III: The Third Lightning*



TREASURE TAKES THE story of a robotic boy and turns it into one of the GBA's best shoot-'em-ups. Fast and relentless and with typical Treasure quirks, it's amazingly hardcore but all the better for it. Equally split between proper flying sections and run-and-gun levels, *Omega Factor* is a blaster that every GBA collector needs to own.

Interesting Fact: Treasure is ace, but you probably already knew that.



FIRE EMBLEM

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Intelligent Systems | **Alternatives:** *Advance Wars 2, Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones, Yggdra Union*



WHILE *ADVANCE WARS* and its sequel would have been acceptable additions to this list, *Fire Emblem* is simply a far better game. For starters there are no clichéd characters to be found, which is refreshing in itself. Each and every one is exceedingly well written, allowing you to bond with them in a way that just isn't possible in *Advance Wars*. The fact that they can't be used again if defeated further adds to their character development, as you really want to play with these delightful characters for as long as possible.

Graphically it's unimpressive, but beneath the basic-looking sprites is an engaging story, finely honed gameplay mechanics – the series has been around since the NES days, after all – and those entertaining heroes. The *Advance Wars* games, which are also developed by Intelligent Systems, are still fantastic, but we'll take this fantasy equivalent every time.

Interesting Fact: This is the prequel to its GBA stablemate, *Fire Emblem: Fuin No Tsurugi*, and takes place 20 years beforehand.



WADE HIXTON'S COUNTER PUNCH

Year Released: 2004 | **Developer:** Destination Software | **Alternatives:** *Hajime No Ippo, Fire Pro Wrestling, Punch King*



FOR SOME INSANE reason, Nintendo felt that the *Punch-Out!!* series wasn't suitable for handheld gaming. This rare error of judgement worked perfectly for Destination Software, as it was able to fill the empty space with this amazingly fun boxing game. Originally known as *Sadistic Boxing* and *Sucker Punch*, *Wade Hixton's Counter Punch* is essentially *Super Punch-Out!!* in all but name. Graphically superb, *Counter Punch* ups the ante by delivering crisp combat mechanics, additional gameplay modes and some truly outrageous special attacks. Some will baulk at the inclusion of only eight fighters, but it's nonetheless an endlessly playable game.

Interesting Fact: A demo version of the game goes by the name of *Wade Hixton's Counter Punch: Mini-Game*.



MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR

Year Released: 2004 | **Developer:** Camelot | **Alternatives:** *Tony Hawk 2, Super Dodge Ball Advance*



IN ADDITION TO being one of the best sports games on the GBA, this superb effort from Camelot is easily the best portable golf game that money can buy. Successfully building on all the mechanics that made the original Game Boy Color game such a joy to play, *Advance Tour* enhances it with its RPG elements, fiendishly designed courses and an excellent multiplayer mode that even allows you to trade collected clubs with other players.

Interesting Fact: Camelot is best known for being the developer of the *Shining Force* series.



BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Konami | **Alternatives:** *Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories, Sword Of Mana, Shining Soul*



YOU CAN ALWAYS trust Hideo Kojima to come up with a game that's a little different to its peers. Part stealth, part action-adventure, *Boktai*'s unique mechanic is that its gameplay focuses on the sun itself. Utilising the clever sensor found within the cartridge, you must harness the power of the sun to stun your undead enemies, and running out of stored solar power means having to avoid enemies rather than battle them. It wasn't the most convenient game to play in the British weather but was still superb fun.

Interesting Fact: Darran spent £220 on the limited edition black and red *Boktai* GBA SP then broke it by drunkenly sitting on it.



METROID FUSION

Year Released: 2002 | **Developer:** Nintendo | **Alternatives:** *Metroid: Zero Mission, Gunstar Super Heroes*



WITH *ZERO MISSION* effectively being a remake of the original NES game, we've instead decided to focus on the equally good *Metroid Fusion*. The fourth main instalment of the series, it sees Samus being chased at key points of the game by a stronger parasitic version of herself, as she attempts to destroy an infected space station. Expertly paced and with a tense, moody atmosphere exemplified by the doppelganger encounters, it's notable for introducing the ability to climb ladders and grab ledges.

Interesting Fact: *Metroid Fusion* links with *Metroid Prime* via the Game Boy Advance Cable.





EVERYTHING CHANGES BUT YOU

Game Boy Advance

Released: 2001

It's hard to imagine with today's vibrant screens, but the original Game Boy Advance didn't actually feature a backlight, making some games extremely tough to play. Reassuringly chunky to hold, even if it does look absolutely gigantic by today's standards, it was a huge success for Nintendo, going on to sell over 36 million units.





Game Boy Advance SP

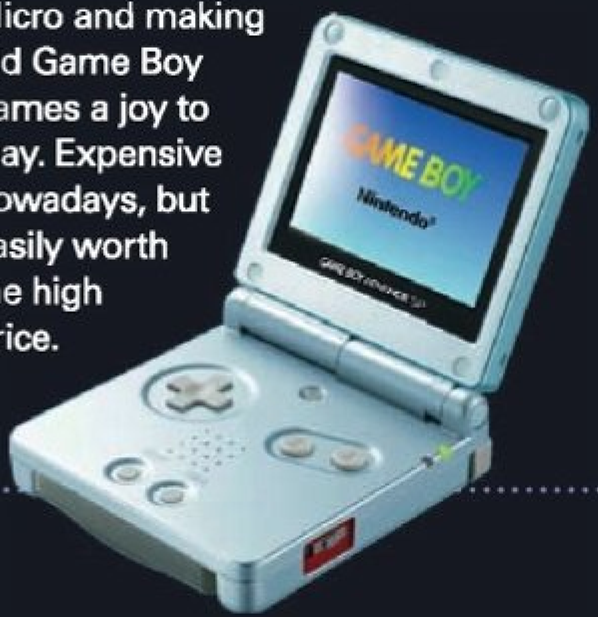
Released: 2003

The SP was released two years after the GBA and featured a number of big improvements. The most important was the lit screen, but the new clamshell design also solved the problem of scratches that the original GBA's screen suffered from. The range went on to sell over 43 million units.

Game Boy Advance SP (AGS-101)

Released: 2005

This model is virtually the same as the original SP, albeit with one important difference. The original SP's frontlit screen is replaced with a backlit one, easily on par with the one found in the Game Boy Micro and making old Game Boy games a joy to play. Expensive nowadays, but easily worth the high price.





Game Boy Micro

Released: 2005

This delightful little handheld was the last hurrah for the GBA. Boasting a pin-sharp screen and ultra cute dimensions at a teeny 2x4x0.7 inches, it caused hand cramp for some and became the ultimate portable for others. Released after the DS, it was let down by incompatibility with Game Boy and Game Boy Color games.

THE SHORT LIST

We tried to ensure that every genre was represented, but that only meant other key games had to be cut. Here are five additional titles that you really need to own

GOLDEN SUN 1&2

Released: 2001, 2002

▷ As *Superstar Saga* is featured elsewhere this issue, we've decided to recommend both *Golden Sun* games. The core mechanics, excellent visuals and challenging combat still make them an essential addition to any RPG collection.





TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Released: 2003

▷ With *River City Ransom EX* and *Double Dragon Advance* being remakes, we're using this to represent the beat-'em-up genre. Beyond the licence you'll find a fast and furious brawler with a great selection of moves.

RHYTHM TENGOKU

Released: 2006

▷ Nintendo's last game for the Game Boy Advance is an absolute doozy and a must for rhythm-action fans everywhere. A selection of surreal rhythm-based mini-games, *Tengoku* plays more like a musical version of *WarioWare*, which makes it essential in our book.





POKÉMON EMERALD

Released: 2004

▷ *Pokémon Emerald* is still a classic game, even if the superior *Black* and *White* versions have made it redundant. There are plenty of improvements over *Ruby* and *Sapphire* to ensure that you'll catch 'em all at least one more time.

GURU LOGI CHAMP

Released: 2001

▷ This pricey little puzzler is mental and has you completing images by firing blocks at them. It's sort of like inverse *Picross*, but you have to continually rotate the screen in order to place your pieces. Utterly weird, but brilliant.



F-ZERO: MAXIMUM VELOCITY

Year Released: 2001 | **Developer:** Nd Cube | **Alternatives:** *F-Zero: GP Legend, Racing Gears Advance, GT3 Advance*



■ ONE OF THE GBA's original launch games, *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity* is one of the best racers on the system. Effortlessly recapturing everything that made the original SNES game so enjoyable to play, *Maximum Velocity* boasts wonderful track design, challenging AI and gorgeous visuals. Set 25 years after the original game, many of the key characters and vehicles are no longer present, but you won't care as the game itself is a real challenge. *Maximum Velocity* also features an excellent multiplayer mode, providing you have enough machines and cartridges.

A sequel, *F-Zero: GP Legend*, arrived two years later, but while it heralded the return of Captain Falcon, its levels and challenge were somewhat lacking.

Interesting Fact: Nd Cube was also responsible for *Tube Slider*.



WARIOWARE, INC: MEGA MICROGAME$!

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Nintendo | **Alternatives:** *WarioWare: Twisted!, Guru Logi Champ, Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Games*



■ IF EVER THERE was a game that people just didn't 'get' on its release, it's this delightfully nutty gem. Seen by many as too short and basic on its debut, the error was only made apparent later when people couldn't put the damned thing down. As with many great games, the beauty of *WarioWare* lies in its simplicity. Prompts appear and you have a few brief seconds to perform the action. It can be anything from hitting a baseball to shaking a dog's paw, but you're so quickly bombarded with crazy tasks that you don't get time to notice the utter absurdity that you're taking part in. It even manages to reintroduce fast-paced versions of classic NES and SNES games.

WarioWare: Twisted! deserves a mention, but the fact that Nintendo was prepared to approve this absurd concept in the first place makes the original the clear winner in our book.

Interesting Fact: Wario made his debut in *Super Mario Land 2*.



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Square | **Alternatives:** *Tactics Ogre: The Knight Of Lodis, Rebelstar*



■ IT WOULD HAVE been easy to fill this list with great SRPGs, as the GBA is rife with them. And while *Tactics Ogre* and Julian Gollop's *Rebelstar* are worthy, it's *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* that we've sunk the most hours into. It offers engaging characters, well-tuned combat and a host of classes. It also introduces Judges, which can help and hinder you by introducing laws for each battle.

Interesting Fact: A radio drama of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* was released in Japan to coincide with the game's release.



MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR

Year Released: 2003 | **Developer:** Netherock | **Alternatives:** *GTA Advance*



WHILE THE GBA has some fun FPSs, *Medal Of Honor: Underground* wasn't one of them. EA saw the error of its ways, though, and made *Infiltrator* far more suitable for its host machine. Like *Commando* on steroids, it's big on action, offering pyrotechnics and tons of enemies to down.

It's also stealthy in places, and while it's no *Metal Gear Solid*, the levels still work surprisingly well. Add in some great visuals and a handful of *Operation Wolf*-styled levels that have you gunning down swarms of enemies, and *Infiltrator* becomes another GBA gem.

Interesting Fact: The game links up to *MOH: Rising Sun* on the GameCube to be used as a map.



MOTHER 3

Year Released: 2006 | **Developer:** Nintendo, Brownie Brown, HAL Laboratory | **Alternatives:** *Golden Sun, Tales Of Phantasia*



SADLY, *MOTHER 3* was only released in Japan. Luckily, a passionate group of fans has created a translation that allows everyone with the know-how to appreciate Nintendo's collaboration with Brownie Brown and HAL Laboratory. Huge in scope – its development spanned the SNES, 64DD and N64 before arriving on the GBA – *Mother 3* boasts a dynamic script, enchanting characters and plenty of neat twists and turns. It's spread across eight huge chapters and features a neat combat mechanic where you can tap along in time with the battle music to score additional attacks. Why this wonderful RPG was never released in the West is completely beyond us.

Interesting fact: You can download the excellent fan translation from **mother3.fobby.net**.



DRILL DOZER

Year Released: 2005 | **Developer:** Game Freak | **Alternatives:** *Wario Land 4, Klonoa: Empire Of Dreams*



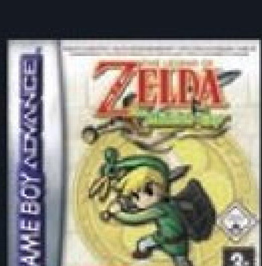
THIS GAME'S BEAUTY is in how you manipulate your drill to double jump, attack and solve puzzles, all with a nice tactile sensation due to the included rumble. Clever level design ensures plenty of routes through each stage, while the joy of drilling never gets old. As it's beautiful to look at and with a ton of hidden areas to uncover – always the hallmark of a good platformer – *Drill Dozer* is an old-school game with an intriguing, innovative twist.

Interesting Fact: *Drill Dozer* is one of only two GBA games to feature rumble functionality.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

Year Released: 2004 | **Developer:** Capcom | **Alternatives:** *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past, Scurge: Hive, Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*



AFTER FINDING HUGE success on the Game Boy Color with its two *Oracle* games, Capcom once again found itself in charge of a new handheld *Zelda*. *The Minish Cap* is a delight thanks to its interesting setting in the diminutive world of the Picori, the traditional batch of new items, expertly designed dungeons and charming characters.

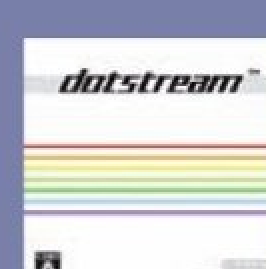
The Minish Cap also introduces Ezlo, a sarcastic little Picori who has been transformed into a strange talking bird hat. Full of witty putdowns and useful advice, he's an engaging addition to the cast of *Zelda* characters that have appeared over the years and one we'd love to see make a return. While it's not the toughest game in the series, *Minish Cap* offers plenty of longevity, particularly if you try to complete its figurine and Kinstone side quests.

Interesting Fact: *The Minish Cap* was released with a gold GBA SP in the UK. Only 25,000 were made.



bIT GENERATIONS

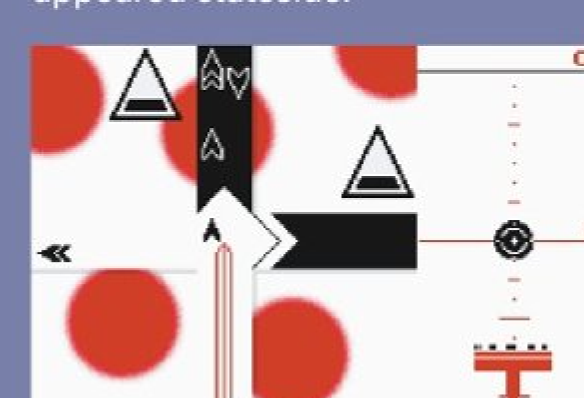
Year Released: 2006 | **Developer:** Skip Ltd/Q-Games | **Alternatives:** *WarioWare, Inc: Mega Microgame$!*



RELEASED EXTREMELY LATE in the GBA's life, *bit Generations* is a collection of games as opposed to a single product. Designed to promote simple but addictive gameplay mechanics, many of them were later released on WiiWare.

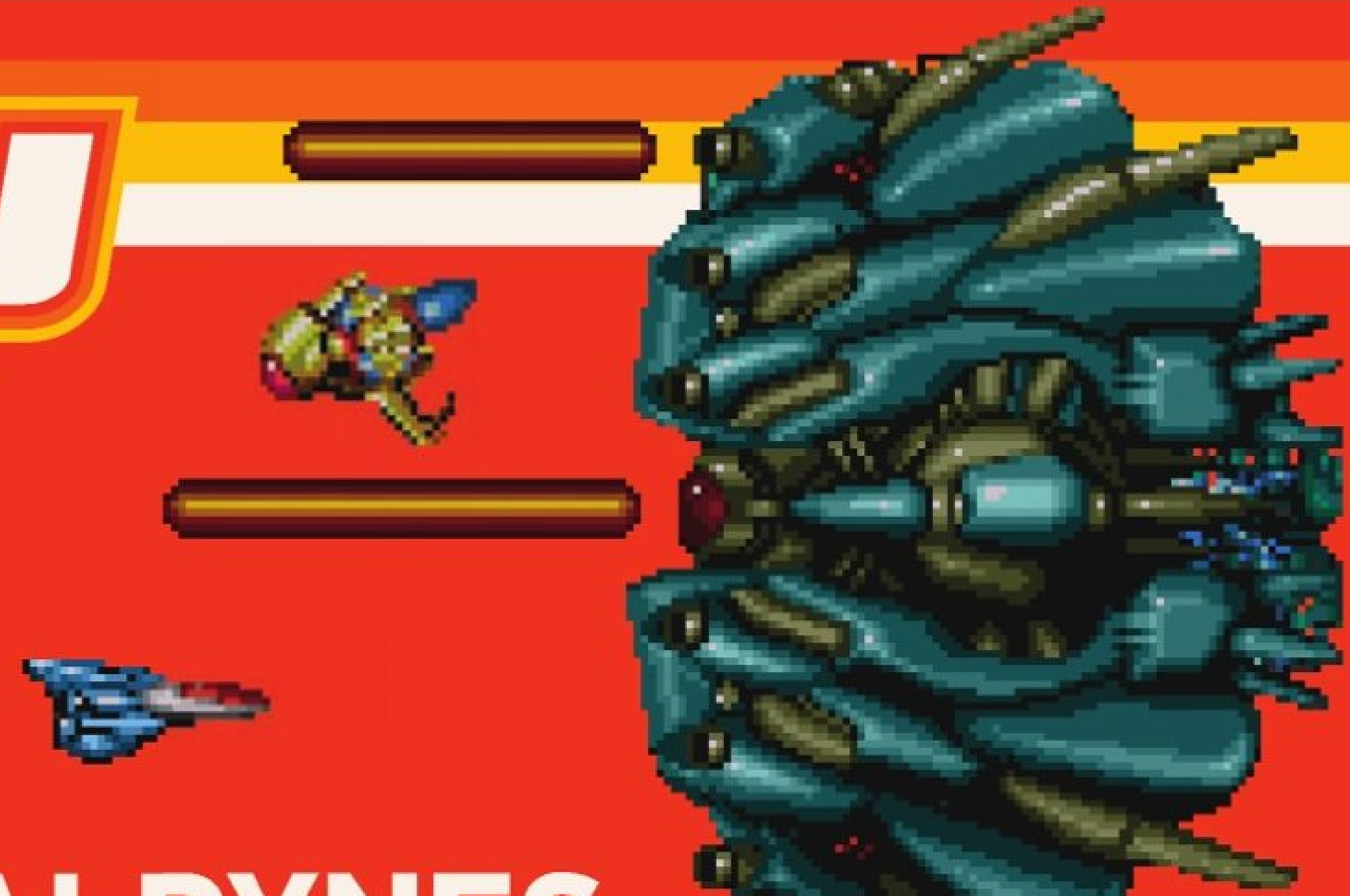
Boundish is an interesting take on *Pong*; *Dialhex* is a puzzle game that has you creating hexagons by rotating triangles; *Coloris* tasks you with eliminating coloured squares by matching them to nearby ones of the same colour; *Soundvoyager* is an amazingly abstract effort that you play using sound only; *Digidrive* has you propelling a disc as far as possible; *Orbital* involves absorbing different-coloured stars; and *Dotstream* emulates the light cycles of *Tron*. Beautifully packaged and, for the most part, brilliant examples of their chosen genres, *bit Generations* is a worthy addition to any serious collection.

Interesting Fact: The series was given an ESRB rating but never appeared stateside.



Minority Report

Over the last few generations, gaming platforms have come and gone, and some have made a great impact; others perhaps less so. Mike Bevan looks at hidden gems available on some of the less mainstream systems, and cult games on some of the more well-known…



ALDYNES

■ SYSTEM: SUPERGRAFX ■ DEVELOPER: HUDSON SOFT ■ YEAR: 1991

» SUPERGRAFX



» [SuperGrafx] The transformation of *Aldynes'* first boss is one of the game's most impressive moments.

■ **The surprising fact about NEC's overpriced SuperGrafx – a console that was only released in Japan, flopped spectacularly after a year, and had a mere five games released for it – is that three of its titles are actually rather good. The first two are Capcom's excellent arcade conversions of *1941* and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*. *Aldynes* is the third.**

Hudson Soft's scrolling shoot-'em-up plays to the strengths of the SuperGrafx system, which itself was never a huge step up from the original PC Engine. Multi-layer parallax scrolling, sprite-scaling and large multi-part bosses are the order of the day, the former typified by the imposing first level guardian, a transforming monstrosity that could have given any of Michael Bay's creations a good thumping. Laser beams and bullets ping all over the shop, scores of enemies and explosions fill the screen, and the game remains solid and largely flicker-free. From a technical standpoint, it's mightily impressive.

Graphical niceties aside, *Aldynes* is an intense, high-quality shooter, which should come as no surprise given Hudson's pedigree with the likes of *Super Star Soldier* and *Soldier Blade*. In fact, *Aldynes* was developed for the company by an outfit called Produce, formed in 1990 by a group of former Irem employees. Indeed, gameplay-wise it owes a lot to the *R-Type* school of progressive option-based shmupping, your uber-sleek spacecraft being accompanied by up to four floating drones that can be locked into formation around your ship or sent off to scour the screen,

» AMIGA CD32

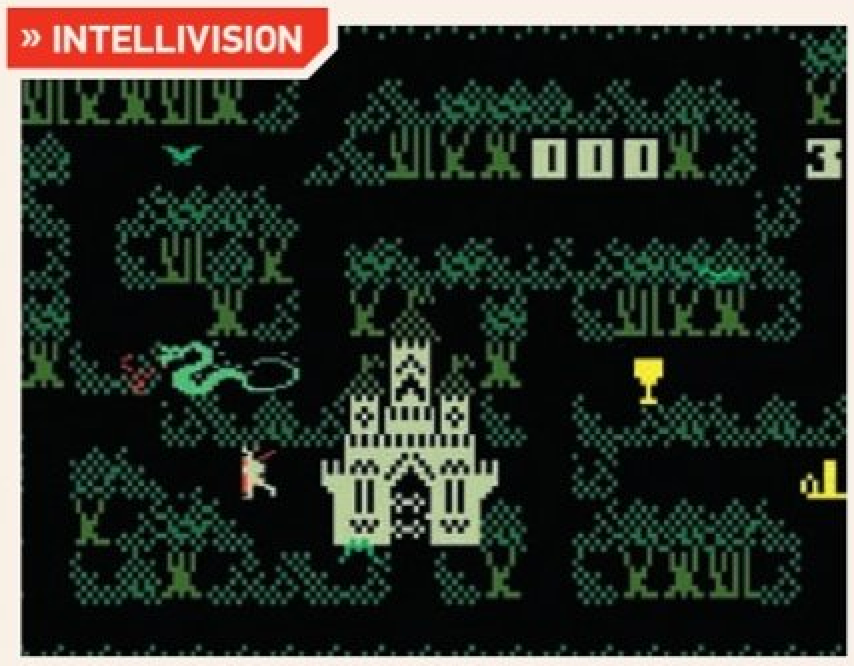


» SEEK & DESTROY

■ SYSTEM: AMIGA CD32 ■ DEVELOPER: MINDSCAPE / VISION SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **This overhead chopper-'em-up** bears some similarities to *Desert Strike*, although it's a much faster offering. *Seek & Destroy* features the rarely used control system first seen in Namco's *Assault*, with your attack helicopter planted at the bottom of the screen and the environment spinning around it as you veer left or right. Missions vary from destroying enemy installations to rescuing hostages, and your extravagant payload of homing missiles, napalm and airstrikes adds to the fun. An enhanced version, with additional tank-based missions, was later released for the PC by Epic MegaGames.

» INTELLIVISION



» THUNDER CASTLE

■ SYSTEM: INTELLIVISION ■ DEVELOPER: MATTEL ■ YEAR: 1986

■ **A *Pac-Man*-style** game with an unusual gothic setting, *Thunder Castle* features a plucky knight battling dragons, wizards and demons in a series of mysterious, ever-changing mazes. From an aesthetic point of view this is the Intellivision's visual masterpiece, with exquisitely atmospheric graphics and wonderfully drawn intermission screens depicting your upcoming adversaries. The background music, featuring a variety of lovingly implemented classical themes, is also worthy of mention. There are only three stages in the game, but quality rather than quantity sets this title apart.

» NES



» GUN NAC

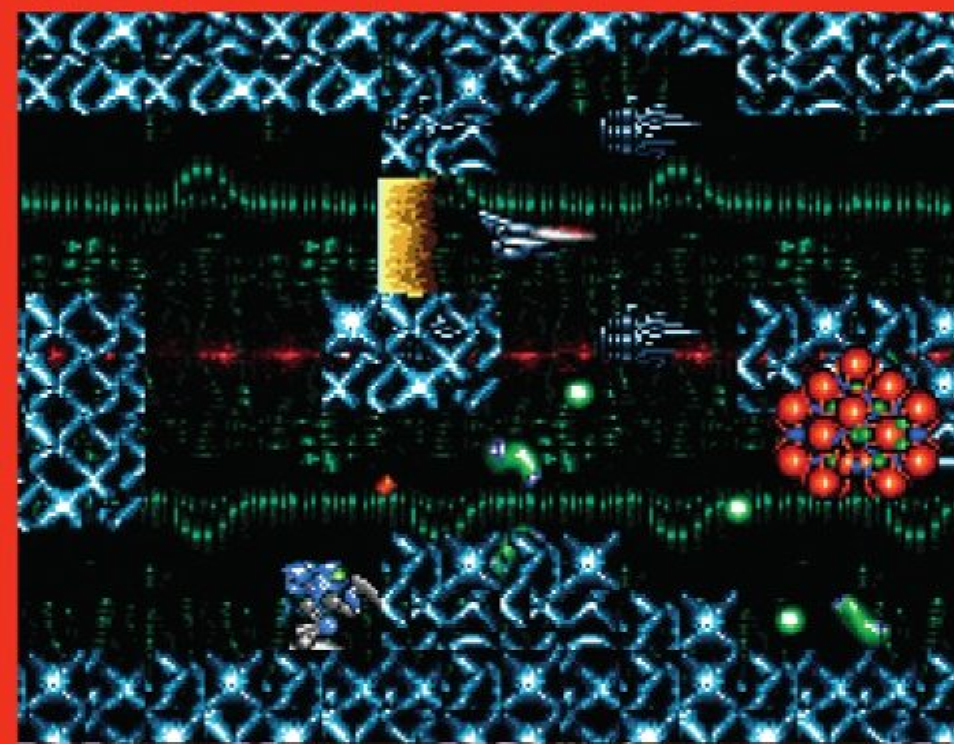
■ SYSTEM: NES ■ DEVELOPER: NEXSOFT/COMPILE ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **In the same** manner to how Konami took to spoofing its *Gradius* series with *Parodius*, Japanese developer Compile sent up its own *Aleste* franchise with this supremely silly but entertaining game, which got a stateside release late in the life of the NES. In *Gun Nac*, carrot-toting rabbits, acorns, fortune kitties and what appear to be rolls of loo paper try to take you down, while extraterrestrial smileys dish out a ludicrous array of power-ups and smart bombs. As with *Aleste* and its predecessor, *Zanac*, the main enjoyment comes from experimentation with the endlessly customisable weaponry.

» [SuperGrafx] Despite his terrifying appearance, this boss is a pushover.



» [SuperGrafx] The walls cause you to become stuck, and a sitting duck.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- The SuperGrafx was a modified PC Engine with enhanced graphics, originally heralded as NEC's answer to the 16-bit Mega Drive and Super Famicom.
- Only five games were released specifically for the system: *1941: Counter Attack*, *Daimakaimura (Ghouls 'N Ghosts)*, *Aldynes*, *Battle Ace* and *Mado King Granzort*.

destroying enemies of their own accord – a system similar to that seen in the later *R-Type Delta*. Alternatively, holding down the second button causes your drones to encircle your craft defensively, a tactic that proves indispensable on later levels.

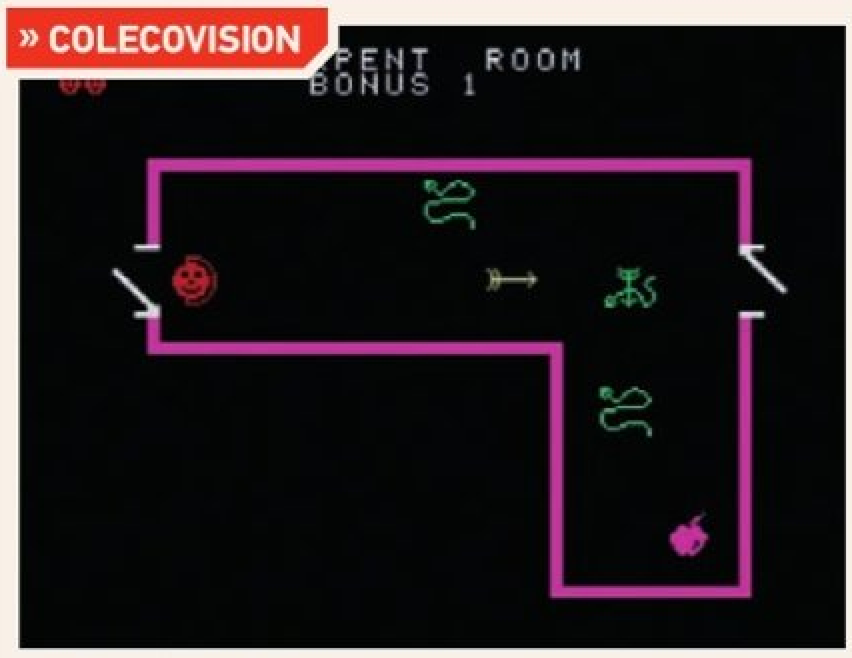
And, of course, there are plenty of weapon power-ups to keep you happy, our favourite being the one we've dubbed the Curly Wurly Laser™. This little beauty emits big blue loops of death along the edges of the screen to devastating effect, although admittedly it's less useful if there's something nasty right in front of you. Other goodies on offer include *Gradius*-style forward and diagonal lasers, and a spread-shot weapon that fires spherical green munitions, all of which can be upgraded to inflict maximum damage. Holding down the fire button allows you to charge a shield, which can be used to ram anything ahead of you. Add to this the blue lightning bolts that your drones spit out in 'free roam' mode and you've got a pretty intimidating arsenal at your disposal.

The seven stages are varied and distinctive, ranging from open outdoor areas to tight corridor sections where the movement and firing patterns give you precious little room for survival. Some stages also scroll up and down, giving you a bit more breathing space. Although tougher than old boots in places, *Aldynes* is nonetheless a must-play for the discerning shooter fan. Incidentally, the game's full title is *Aldynes: The Mission Code For Rage Crisis*, which is an adorable bit of Engrish that someone really should make a T-shirt of…



» [SuperGrafx] Watch out for the aerial mines that go out with a bang…

» COLECOVISION



» VENTURE

- SYSTEM: COLECOVISION
- DEVELOPER: COLECO/EXIDY ■ YEAR: 1982

■ **Exidy's arcade adventure** casts you in the role of a rather unlikely hero, a disembodied head with a bow and arrow called Winky, whose goal is to raid a series of meanie-filled rooms for treasure. *Venture* plays like a primitive version of *Atic Atac*, and shares a lot of similarities with Stern's more famous arcade shooter, *Berzerk*. Graphically and aurally the ColecoVision effort is pretty much a perfect conversion, although as the arcade version used a pressure-sensitive joystick, which was impossible to re-create, Coleco's port introduced a slight delay between movements, which can prove irritating in tight corners.

» ATARI 5200



» ZENJI

- SYSTEM: ATARI 5200
- DEVELOPER: ACTIVISION ■ YEAR: 1984

■ ***Zenji* is an** inventive cross between a puzzler and maze game that involves guiding a face around a grid of hexagonal blocks via a series of tracks, attempting to fill the grid with a uniform green colour. This is achieved by rotating the blocks so that the tracks all interconnect, all while avoiding nasties, which become more of a threat the closer you get to your goal. *Zenji* requires a certain amount of forward thinking under pressure due to the tight time limit, and its unusual concept may prove a little confusing at first, but stick with it because it proves an engrossing and addictive little title once everything clicks.

» C64



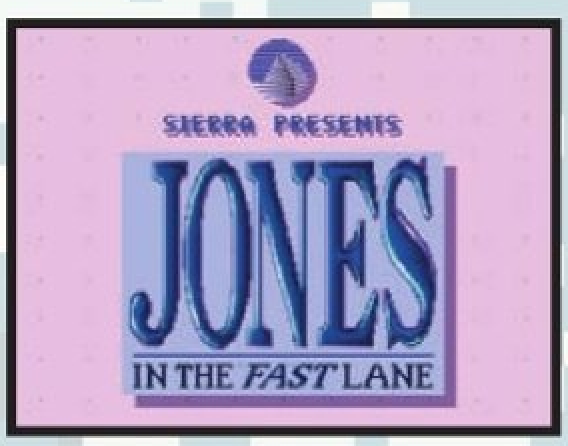
» RAGING BEAST

- SYSTEM: C64
- DEVELOPER: FIREBIRD/JAWK ■ YEAR: 1985

■ **Also known as** *Olé!*, this hilarious budget title is a tongue-in-cheek simulation of the controversial art of the matador, albeit one in which the protagonist usually comes off far worse than the bull. Indeed, the star of the game is Alfonso, your bovine foil with a really bad attitude, who takes great delight in humiliating our hapless toreador at every turn. Last long enough waving your red towel in his face and you'll get the chance to pin a wreath on his bonce and win the game, but there's a higher chance of ending up in hospital after he's tossed you across the ring then sat on you, applauding himself in the process.

JONES IN THE

In 1991, Sierra On-Line released an unusual title that looked and played like an adaptation of a classic board game. It wasn't; it was an original game called Jones In The Fast Lane, and Graeme Mason spoke to lead programmer and designer Warren Schwader to learn more about education, career, wealth and happiness…

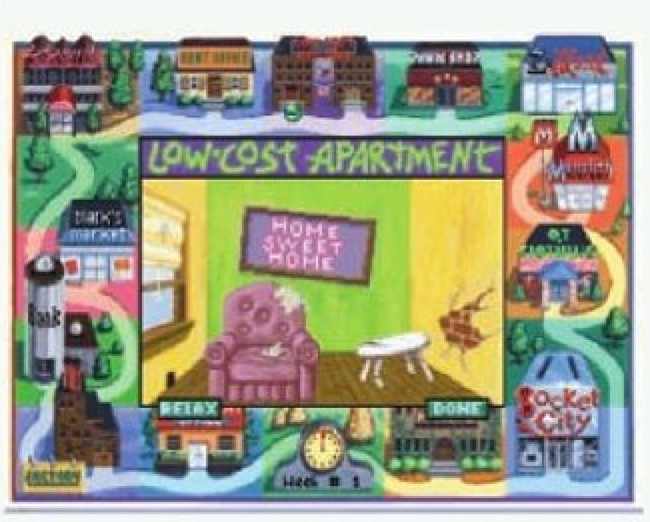


IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** SIERRA ON-LINE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **PLATFORM:** MS-DOS
» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **GENRE:** LIFE SIMULATION



» [DOS] Weekend reports are always good for a laugh. *Jones* knows how to have a good time.



» [DOS] Your first task is to get an apartment, but you'll have to start at the bottom.

The story of *Jones In The Fast Lane* does not begin at Sierra but at the home of the Whaley family in California. Along with Kelly Walker, the Whaleys were ardent computer enthusiasts and spent many evenings developing the concept for a game entitled *Keeping Up With The Joneses*. Their idea was to create a 'life simulation' where the player took on the role of a character who must make progress through the game world, gaining the necessary achievements while competing against other human players or the computer – the eponymous Jones. With the two brothers, Chris and Robert, set to leave home for university, they decided to sell the idea to Sierra On-Line, and from this point the story moves to lead programmer Warren Schwader, who was Sierra's first full-time developer, having begun work there back in February 1981.

RG: Hello, Warren. How did you begin working at Sierra?
WS: Simply, Ken Williams bought some of my self-marketed games from a computer store and invited me to California to work for him. Incidentally, the games – *Bustout*, *William Tell* and *Smash-Up* – were later repackaged onto a floppy disk and re-released by Sierra.

RG: How did you end up working on *Jones In The Fast Lane*?
WS: I think the timing was right. I had just finished one of the Hoyle products [a series of board and card game adaptations] when *Jones* was acquired by Sierra. It was in text form and licensed by us to develop utilising multimedia aspects that Sierra were keen to promote.

RG: *Jones In The Fast Lane*'s simplicity is key, making the game easy to get into. Was this something you imagined from the start?
WS: Yes, and the original text-based game was fun as it was, so we stayed fairly true to its template while adding the multimedia elements and Sierra style and humour.

RG: On the subject of humour, there are a number of inside jokes and also a friendly atmosphere in *Jones*, which almost reminds the player of another certain close-knit community…
WS: I guess that's true; it did ring a little of the Sierra community itself. I just thought it was important to keep the player entertained during the game. However, I wasn't too keen on the in-jokes between the different games. I think it takes you out of the game world you are in unless it's meant to be a satire like *Space Quest*.

RG: Going back to those multimedia aspects, *Jones In The Fast Lane* employed rotoscoping as well as the emerging CD-ROM storage format.
WS: Indeed. *Jones* had a four-person design team and they wanted to feature real people using real voices and lip-synching, as it didn't seem right to have digitised people and then not synchronise their lips. CD-ROM gave us plenty of room for this and other features, and we wanted people to have a reason to buy the CD version over the floppy disk release. Sierra were desperate for the CD-ROM format to succeed as it would allow us to make bigger and better games. But this was very far from a certainty at the time.

RG: So was *Jones* the first CD-ROM game by Sierra?
WS: It was released very close to another CD game called *Mother Goose*. As I recall *Jones* was first, but I'm not sure anyone could state this for sure. It was like delivering twins, one after the other!

NEW TO JONES? READ HERE FIRST

THE FOUR GOALS of *Jones In The Fast Lane* are wealth, happiness, education and career. Each player takes a turn, which represents one week, and what you do is dictated by a timer, with each activity allotted a certain amount of time. Each turn is open-ended, but working and eating are necessary, and education and work experience are key in order to advance your career rating and increase your earnings.

Money buys you goods, gets you a better education and enables you to invest in stocks and shares. Some purchases, such as a business suit, are imperative, while others are used to enhance happiness, like a television or theatre tickets; a good balance between work and play is critical in *Jones In The Fast Lane*, much like in real life.

As the game progresses, each player can assess the standings to see where they need to improve their character's life, and the first player to achieve success in all four areas is proclaimed the winner. Prepare for the game of life!



FAST LANE

RG: It appears clear to us that Sierra was keen to exploit new technologies in its games.
WS: Sierra were always pushing the envelope forward, at least until the mid-Nineties, which probably explains why they began to struggle at that point. I believe several technologies advanced faster than they would have thanks to Sierra's attitude here.

RG: For the development of *Jones* Sierra employed a new manager, Bill Davis. What was his role?
WS: Bill had been brought in as they attempted to move away from the programmer-as-developer approach that was prevalent back then. He was involved in the art direction, and he championed the use of storyboards, a fresh concept at the time.

> "Several technologies advanced faster thanks to Sierra's attitude here"

RG: How did the locations around the town match the original idea and were there any that didn't make the final cut?
WS: We stayed fairly true to the original text game. Looking back, there were many additional locations and elements we could have added, but it was also a matter of screen space and how the presentation allowed for it. The artwork had significant influence on the game design, and in fact took precedence over it.

RG: *Jones In The Fast Lane* can be quite tricky to beat due to many hidden calculations, such as work experience and history.
WS: Maybe, but part of the fun was finding out which strategies worked best. To be honest, the internal workings could have done with some more refinement. For example, instead of merely telling the player they were sick and charging them, we could have included a hospital for them to visit.

RG: Why wasn't the game released on other platforms, such as the Commodore Amiga?
WS: I think Sierra just bought into the PC completely, and at the time I believe they made the right choice.



» [DOS] Appliances such as a TV or stereo raise your happiness rating.



RG: When it was released, *Jones In The Fast Lane* was not much of a success for Sierra. Did this disappoint you, and why do you think it sold relatively poorly?
WS: I'm not sure. Possibly something to do with marketing, as other companies had bigger hits with inferior titles, in my opinion. I attribute Sierra's successes to having cutting-edge products at the right time, even though it didn't work out quite so well with *Jones*.

RG: Despite its lack of initial success, it's obvious that *Jones In The Fast Lane* has a significant following, with several remakes on the internet. Does this make you proud?
WS: The people who did buy it all seemed to like it and many mention how *Jones* has played an important part in their lives. And yes, this gives me a lot of satisfaction, even now.

RG: *Jones* would have made a great board game.
WS: I agree! As far as I know it was never considered, though.

RG: Finally, what's the best way to become a high achiever?
WS: Generally you just need to stick to the basics: eat every week, go to school, then work and watch that economy. If prices are going down you'll still want to consider a promotion, even if it means you will earn less money, and don't forget to work a fair amount each week or you won't even get that opportunity of a promotion or a raise in salary.

Our thanks to Warren Schwader, Guruka Singh Khalsa and Meredith Whaley.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

QUEST FOR GLORY: SO YOU WANT TO BE A HERO
SYSTEMS: MS-DOS
YEAR: 1989

SPACE QUEST IV: ROGER WILCO AND THE TIME RIPPERS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: MS-DOS
YEAR: 1991

GABRIEL KNIGHT: SINS OF THE FATHERS
SYSTEM: MS-DOS
YEAR: 1993

IT'S GOING TO COST US HOW MUCH?

"IT WAS THE heyday of adventure gaming with Sierra and the first widely played graphic adventure games," says Guruka Singh Khalsa, Sierra's producer for *Jones*. "Chris Whaley came to us with the concept and we spent a lot of time tweaking and balancing the gameplay. It was basically a stat-driven life game – long before the incredible success of *The Sims*." *Jones* was also an early CD format game. "We had a CD-burning machine that cost $140,000 and you had to burn the whole gold master disc in one go, or the disc was a coaster," recalls Guruka with a smile. "And each blank disc cost $140!"



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Atari Corporation Part 2

Out of the ashes of Atari, Inc rose a new company, Atari Corporation, as well as a second chance for recently ousted Commodore founder Jack Tramiel. With highs and lows, unfortunately it would be the swan song of the Atari brand

Normally, coming back to work from a 4 July weekend in the US is an uneventful affair. It's an extra-long weekend, and employees are refreshed after spending time with friends and family celebrating America's independence. Even more so for 1984's celebrations, as the fourth fell on a Wednesday that year and many employees at Atari took off the two preceding days to have a five-day weekend. Those same employees found themselves coming back on the fifth to a company ripped in half. Literally.

Over that weekend, Warner Communications executives had conducted a series of secret negotiation meetings with former Commodore head Jack Tramiel for the purchase of Atari's consumer division as well as its distribution and manufacturing network. So secret that Atari's own CEO, James Morgan, had no idea until he was called into one of Atari's meeting rooms to sign the papers. Signing on the dotted line, the consumer division was given to Jack for no money down – just $240 million in long-term notes, and warrants for a 32 per cent interest in Tramiel's new company, Atari Corporation. Warner kept the coin division of Atari, Inc, and Morgan stayed on to oversee the company's further dissolution and its restructuring into the coin-driven Atari Games. Both companies would share Atari, Inc's game properties, with Jack's new company owning the trademarks and home rights. The Atari logo would be shared by both as well, under the stipulation that the coin company would have to include the word 'Games' under its logo. The ensuing transition was fast, furious and sloppy. No long period of board approval since it was just a portion of the company being sold, no time for employees to make transition plans, no time for the wrapping up of ongoing projects and business deals, no time for anything other than mass chaos.

Even Jack had no idea what he was physically getting in the deal, and proceeded to lock down buildings to begin a month-long process of inventory and project evaluations. At that time Atari had consisted of 70 buildings throughout Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, San Jose and Milpitas. The main Sunnyvale headquarters alone had around 35 buildings, whose functions were mixed enough that some of the consumer division's advanced research operations were housed in the coin division's headquarters, unbeknownst to Jack. At other buildings where much of the prototype, promo and project materials were kept, people started pulling up vans and U-Hauls to cart off items en masse. The company mainframe was no less susceptible, and many started deleting their work directories and emails in protest, hiding much of the recent work done under Atari, Inc from Jack and his people.

The projects and buildings weren't the only thing being appraised. Jack and his management team also had to evaluate all the employees that had been part of the consumer division to decide who they were going to take to the new company. Jack's son, Leonard, was tasked with leading

INSTANT EXPERT

Atari Corporation was formed from merging Atari, Inc's consumer division with Tramel Technologies Ltd. It was spelt 'Tramel' instead of 'Tramiel' so that people didn't mispronounce the name.

Jack Tramiel bought Atari's consumer division after being ousted from Commodore. It was purchased primarily for its manufacturing and distributing.

The Atari 520ST was Jack's answer to his fear of the Japanese entering and dominating the US computer market.

Atari Corporation re-released the 7800 after settling debts with the developer GCC. It was not in response to the release of Nintendo's NES.

The XEGS was meant to be the "5200 done right", also using Atari's 8-bit computer internals but making the console expandable to a full Atari computer with the addition of a keyboard.

The Atari Lynx was developed under software publisher Epyx as the Handy. Atari Corporation initially licensed it but received full ownership of the hardware after Epyx went bankrupt.

The Atari Portfolio was the world's first MS-DOS-compatible palmtop computer.

The Atari Falcon was the last computer ever sold under the Atari name. It was on the market for just a year.



DESERT FALCON



> **“ Jack didn’t plan to return unless he thought the Japanese were coming and Commodore couldn’t beat them ”**
>
> MICHAEL S TOMCZYK, FORMER ASSISTANT TO JACK TRAMIEL



the project and personnel evaluations. Those who passed joined the new Atari Corporation, and those who didn’t were technically already out of a job with the collapse of Atari, Inc. “Our goal was to take what we had and turn it into a functional and profitable company before we ran out of money,” said Leonard recently. “Hopefully long before. The need to act quickly was obvious for many reasons. It would save money and shorten the anxiety of not knowing. It was really awful; about 1,000 people lost their jobs in about one week.”

One humorous tale did emerge from that time period, however, on a trek up to Atari, Inc’s coin-op headquarters to interview prospective recruits. As Leonard and a colleague entered the building, an employee got on the PA system and warned, “Imperial troops have entered the building,” as if Darth Vader himself were entering the rebel stronghold. “I wound up hiring him,” recalls Leonard.

Jack was still in a precarious financial position, though. He had sunk millions of his own money into the new company to keep operations afloat during July and August while pursuing the mountain of debt owed to Atari, Inc that Warner had him take on, intending to collect it and use it to fund operations for the longer term. Only nobody was paying, and by August Jack was already struggling – a situation that continued into 1985 and resulted in several renegotiations and financial assistance from Warner. To make matters worse, Jack had also taken on most of Atari, Inc’s bad debt as part of his deal, so Warner could get the losses off its books. Likewise, a number of expected money-making products had stayed with Warner, including the recently announced Atari 7800. Adding to the worries, it wasn’t more than a few days after the negotiations that his old company, Commodore, fired a shot across his bow by filing injunctions against his new VP of R&D, Shiraz Shivji, and two other ex-Commodore engineers. They were accused of theft of trade secrets and barred from doing any computer work, effectively shutting down development of his planned new computer for the month of July.

Leonard found the means to strike back in the form of a cancelled cheque. Unbeknownst to them, Warner and Atari, Inc had struck up a deal with the very company that Jack had visited back in April: Amiga Corporation. While Shiraz and other engineers were locked up in a hotel room in April and May, planning out a new low-cost, high-power computer to unleash against the Japanese, Jack was visiting various companies along California’s coast for possible new technology and facilities to leverage for the new computer. Amiga was one of several companies that Jack had brief flirtations with buying that ultimately ▶

BY THE NUMBERS

6 The number of consoles released under Atari Corporation: 2600 Jr, 5200 (re-release), 7800, XE Game System, Atari Lynx, Atari Jaguar.

2 The number of titles held by Sam Tramiel at once when he was both CEO and president of Atari Corporation.

3.77 million The number of Atari 7800s sold in the US between 1986 and 1990.

28 The number of Atari computer models released between 1985 and 1993.

51 The number of games released by Atari Corporation for the 7800.

73 The number of games Atari released for the Lynx.

42 The number of games Atari released for the Jaguar.

250,000 The number of Jaguars manufactured.

125,000 The number of Jaguars actually sold between 1993 and 1995.

1 The number of employees left at the time of Atari Corporation’s closure.





» Atari Portfolio, the MS-DOS *Tempest 2000*, and various Atari calculators. Jack briefly tried to get back into the calculator business under Atari.

TIMELINE

1984 JACK TRAMIEL RETURNS FROM A WORLD VACATION AND FORMS TRAMEL TECHNOLOGY LTD

1984 JACK BUYS ATARI, INC'S CONSUMER DIVISION FROM WARNER COMMUNICATIONS

1984 WIRE WRAPPING OF THE ST PROTOTYPE, RBP, COMMENCES. COMPLETED BY THE END OF AUGUST, OS DEVELOPMENT BEGINS IN SEPTEMBER

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Jack Tramiel
After retiring once JTS collapsed, Jack has spent most of his time out of the limelight. Save for a rare public appearance in 2007 in honour of the 25th anniversary of the Commodore 64, he spends his time enjoying his extended family and donating to places like the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. What computer does he still claim to use after all these years? A Commodore 64.



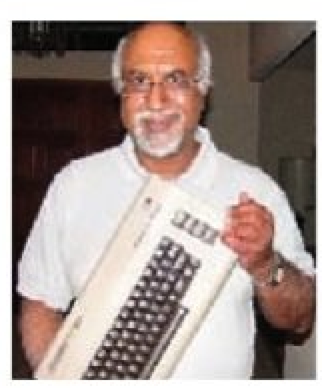
Sam Tramiel
Sam is currently involved in Tramiel Capital, Inc. TCI was founded by Sam in 1996, through which he holds real estate with other family members and makes investments in both high-tech and low-tech businesses, helping to fund a new generation of tech entrepreneurs.

Leonard Tramiel
After Atari Corporation closed down, Leonard went back to his



astrophysics roots and became an eighth-grade astronomy teacher. He's also volunteered at the Chabot Space & Science Center since. In 2010 Leonard became the co-ordinator for the Center For Inquiry San Francisco, where he promotes evidence-based inquiry into paranormal and fringe science claims, alternative medicine and mental health practices, religion, secular ethics and society.

Shiraz Shivji
After leaving Atari Corporation in 1989, Shiraz worked for Momenta International, where he developed a pentop computer. By



1999 he found himself as VP of engineering at Canesta, Inc – a designer of low-cost electronic perception technology. He is currently CEO of Giotti, Inc, a medical technology research firm.

John Skruch
The last man out of Atari Corporation moved on to be a project manager



at a dotcom for several years until the bubble burst. He's currently the account manager at 8x8, a cloud-based business communications firm.

went nowhere. Now here was a cancelled cheque for $500,000 and contracts detailing a further licensing agreement that was to have been signed in June between Atari and Amiga. Instead, it appeared the money was returned with interest under the guise of Amiga not getting its custom chips to work. It would have been one of many Atari, Inc projects that faded away had Commodore not announced in July that it was purchasing Amiga and its technology. Renegotiating with Warner during the first week of August 1984 to get ownership of the original contract, Jack launched a countersuit the following week. The two companies locked horns in the courts for the next few years, with Commodore settling out of court in Atari Corp's favour. But the message sent in the interim was clear: you may have forced me from my company, but I'm not going away.

The future looks bright…

Throughout the rest of the year, Jack updated the inherited 8-bit line of computers, finishing operating system development of the new 68000-based computer – then named simply RBP (Rock Bottom Price) – slashed prices of warehouses full of console and computer inventory, and negotiated with Warner and GCC over the Atari 7800. At the January 1985 Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Jack debuted a demo model of his new computer, by this time renamed the ST and soon nicknamed the Jackintosh by the press. Alongside were the 65 and 130XE 8-bit computers and Atari, Inc mainstays like the 2600 and previously cancelled 5200. The slogan of his new ST computer line, 'power without the price', made it clear that Jack intended to do again what he had done with the Commodore 64: provide a powerful mid-range computer for a low-end price that undercuts everyone.

Sales of price-reduced videogame and 8-bit computer back stock generated more income throughout 1985, allowing Jack to put more into the launch of the first two computers of the ST line – the 520 and 1040ST – that summer. Unfortunately, some of those gains were made possible with a reduction in the workforce, from 2,000 employees the previous summer to 165 by June. Jack also reached an agreement with Warner to pay GCC for the 7800's development and ten launch titles.

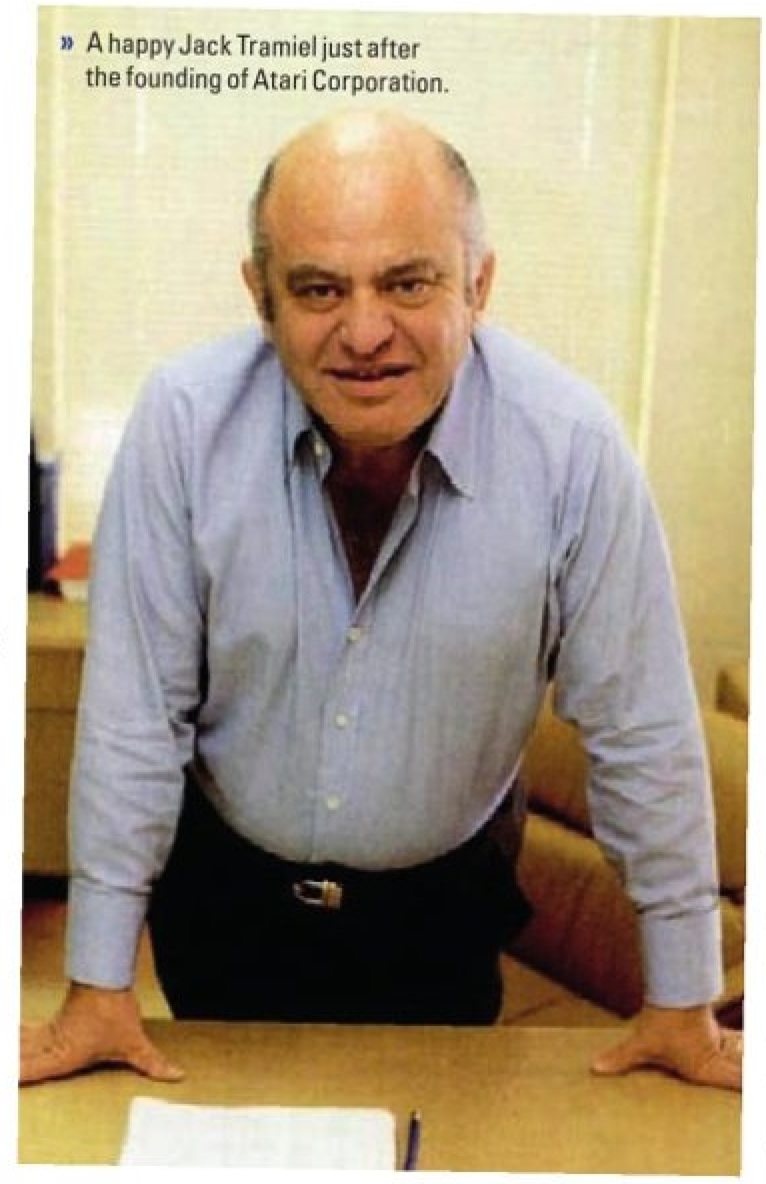
By August of 1985 he was looking to restart his videogame division. Michael Katz was tapped from Epyx to do just that, and he changed the consumer division into the entertainment electronics division. Katz's vision was to have Atari Corporation expand to all electronic toys, not just videogames. He immediately set about getting more licences together for the relaunch of the 7800 as well as launching the delayed cost-reduced 2600, sometimes referred to as the 2600 Jr, at the magic price point of $50.

The 7800 was relaunched at the January 1986 CES, and by April the announcement was out: Jack had done it. Atari Corporation was out of the red and in the black, and the brand was profitable again. The 7800s that had been sitting in warehouses since 1984 quickly sold out, and by the time of the June 1986 CES Atari was once again 'hot' for both computers and consoles. All was rosy, except for the presence of a Japanese company by the name of Nintendo and its Nintendo Entertainment System.

Katz had first heard of Nintendo in the US market while he was looking for arcade licences for the 7800 in November 1985, finding many of them already snatched up for the NES. But with the company having no reputation among retail channels other than a test market in New York, nothing was thought of it. By the time of the June show, however, it had expanded to Los Angeles and was growing. The fact that both Atari and Nintendo, as well as the emerging Sega, were releasing consoles was taken as a sign that the consumer videogame market in the US was returning – and with a vengeance.

On the heels of the 'official' national 7800 launch, Atari Corporation went public

- **1985** THE ST SERIES DEBUTS AT THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW IN LAS VEGAS
- **1985** JACK BEGINS LOOKING FOR CANDIDATES TO JUMPSTART A NEW VIDEOGAME DIVISION AND RELAUNCH THE 7800
- **1986** ATARI 7800 IS RELAUNCHED
- **1986** JACK MANAGES TO BRING ATARI CORPORATION INTO THE BLACK, WIPING OUT ALL DEBT INHERITED FROM ATARI, INC
- **1987** ATARI CORP INTRODUCES THE XE GAME SYSTEM, MEGA SERIES OF COMPUTERS, AND IBM PC-COMPATIBLE COMPUTERS
- **1988** JACK TRAMIEL STEPS DOWN AS CEO. SAM TRAMIEL SERVES AS PRESIDENT AND CEO
- **1989** ATARI CORP DEBUTS THE PORTABLE COLOUR ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM, SOON TO BE CALLED THE LYNX
- **1991** ATARI CORP DISCONTINUES THE ATARI 2600, 5200, 7800 AND XE GAME SYSTEM
- **1992** ATARI CORP INTRODUCES THE ATARI FALCON030, ITS LAST COMPUTER
- **1993** ATARI CORP INTRODUCES THE JAGUAR
- **1996** ATARI CORP MERGES WITH JTS CORPORATION
- **1998** JTS CORPORATION SELLS ALL ATARI ASSETS TO HASBRO FOR $5 MILLION



» A happy Jack Tramiel just after the founding of Atari Corporation.

with its stock, giving it the money to pay back Warner for all loans and leaving it with 48 per cent of a profitable brand.

Flying high with Atari

By 1987, operations were in full force at Atari Corporation. The 7800 was the number two console in the US, and the cost-reduced 2600 was a top-selling low-end console, which was ensuring that Atari was flush with cash. Not one to settle for anything except total market domination, Jack decided to attack the rising Nintendo with a high-end console with capabilities that would set it further apart: the ability to expand into a full computer.

"We wanted to do the 5200 done right," says Leonard. Michael Katz was of the opposite mindset: "In order for a console to be successful it's about the hot titles. You need a hot title for the launch. We didn't have one and I was against releasing the console, but Jack insisted on it anyway."

The XE Game System (XEGS) was released to consumers as a console with a bundled lightgun and built-in computer version of *Missile Command*. Why that version? Because under the hood, the XEGS was powered by a 65XE computer. Driving home the fact even more was the curious distribution method of mainly computer speciality stores.

On the computer front, sales were good but frustrating. Rather than investing dollars in research to significantly update the ST family's operating system (GEM and TOS), Atari Corp instead released a continuing flow of hardware revisions as new models. By 1987 Atari had released the 520ST, 520STM (with television modulator), 520STF (with a built-in floppy drive) and 520STFM (both the modulator and floppy). Likewise, it had released the 1040STF (520ST with an extra 1MB RAM and an internal floppy drive), and the 1040STFM (1040STF with TV modulator).

Added to this was Atari's entry into the workstation market, the Mega ST series, with models that represented arbitrary hardware upgrades – Mega 1, 2 and 4 simply refer to the amount of RAM in the machines. Inside, the Mega itself introduced some features that Atari ST users had been asking for: a card expansion slot and detached keyboard. There was also Atari's new Blitter graphics co-processor chip… at least for some of the models, once again causing confusion among retailers and consumers. As if to hedge his bets in this new high-end business market, Jack also had Atari Corporation start an IBM PC clone line called the Atari PC.

One lingering obstacle still remained in the way of raising sales of the ST line: the legend of Jack Tramiel. While sales of the ST range were strong in Europe, Jack's days as head of Commodore had left a bad taste in the mouths of many of the larger US retail chains, and getting into them was a challenge. Jack had been focusing on smaller speciality computer stores and made some headway in music stores thanks to the built-in MIDI support's popularity with musicians, but in a move that foreshadowed Gateway's and Apple's similar moves in the late Nineties and 2000s, Jack sought to get around the retail problem by creating his own stores. The answer was to purchase electronics chain Federated Electronics and install his second son Garry, then a VP at Atari Corporation, as its president.



» The Jaguar era art team going out for sushi.

> **"Jack believed in motivating people by instilling fear that their jobs were dispensable"**
>
> DONALD A THOMAS JR, DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICE/MARKETING

Together forever

1988 became a year of transition at Atari Corporation. Jack had his overall goal accomplished – a strong company and legacy that he could leave his sons to run – so he made plans to retire from daily operations and have his son Sam take over the CEO position in addition to his current duties as president. Jack would remain involved in larger decisions as chairman of Atari Corporation's board, but otherwise Sam was in charge of everything as of that May.

Even though the distance between Atari and Nintendo in the console market had widened, Atari continued its trifecta approach of the 2600, 7800 and XEGS, releasing 45 new games for those systems. However, the real important developments at the company were happening behind the scenes.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Atari began work on a replacement for the 7800 and XEGS called the Super XE, which soon morphed into a way to leverage the ST's internals for use in a 16-bit games console. Atari found that it was not alone in looking at this new market when Sega of America contacted it. Although the Master System had done well internationally, in the US it placed third behind the NES and Atari's 7800. Sega was looking to ▶

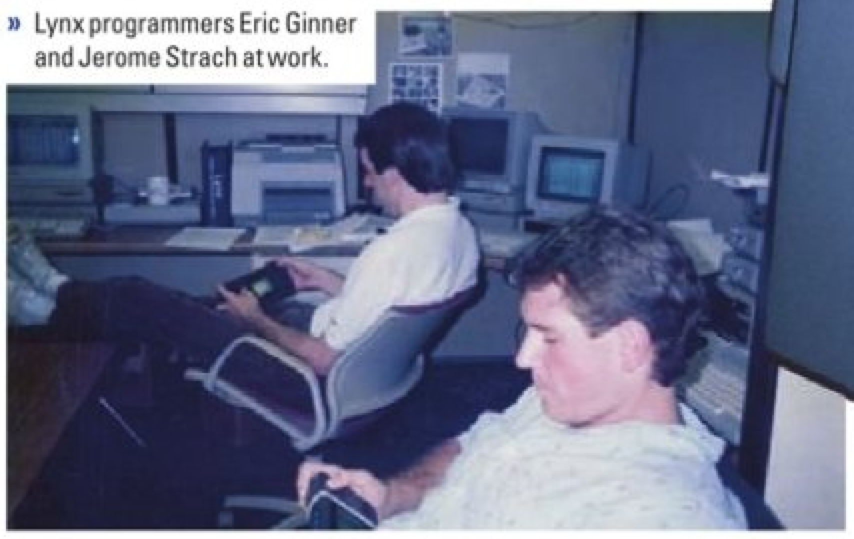


ATARI MICROBOX

Atari was working on three different replacements for the Falcon at one point, all of which were cancelled to focus on the Jaguar: a full 32-bit version, a 68040 version, and a version called Painter that would use the Jaguar chipset. All were to fit into a new stylish workstation-oriented case called the Microbox. If the Microbox case looks familiar, it's because Sony licensed elements of the case for the PS2. How did it know about it? Many ex-Atari Corporation people wound up at Sony after the 1995 purge.



» Viewing the Batmobile, on display at Atari HQ as part of the Lynx *Batman* release festivities.



» Lynx programmers Eric Ginner and Jerome Strach at work.



strike up a partnership with Atari by having its upcoming 16-bit Mega Drive system released in the US as an Atari-branded product. Serious talks ensued but ultimately fell apart, as Jack wanted international rights, as well as the US.

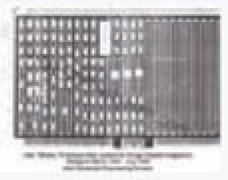
A licensing relationship with Katz's old company, Epyx, was further expanded that year to include hardware. Epyx had been having financial problems and was looking for assistance to get its Handy handheld game console to the market. The deal struck had Atari manufacturing and distributing all the Handy units under its own name, while Epyx would provide all the software. By the time it would come to fruition in 1989 as the Atari Lynx, Epyx was going bankrupt and the entire rights to the powerful colour handheld system would move over to Atari.

While getting complete ownership of the Lynx in 1989 would position Atari at the forefront of the coming handheld console revolution, 1989 would also be the year that Atari and Jack's legacy began to unravel. The first sign was on 31 January 1989, when Atari Corporation filed a $250 million lawsuit against Nintendo for its restrictive third-party licensing practices that locked in the most popular developers to only write games for Nintendo's platform. While not the only company to complain and go to court over the policy, it signified the beginning of an era of lawsuits launched by Atari Corporation to either change the marketplace in its favour or gain more money. It ultimately lost the Nintendo case, but by the time it was decided Nintendo had dropped the practice anyway and begun focusing on the upcoming Super Nintendo. However, Atari would later win a series of patent violations against Sega, which resulted in an influx of cash and licensing deals that brought Sega games to Atari platforms.

In February Michael Katz left, ostensibly to retire, but by the end of the year he was at Sega of America as its new CEO, positioning the freshly launched Sega Genesis to be the dominant console of the early Nineties. And as the final blow in a flurry of punches, in March Atari announced that it was selling off Federated Electronics. Jack's distribution plan had not worked, and instead the operation had siphoned off more money from Atari as it needed constant financial support to stay afloat.



ATARI VS COMMODORE



Probably no other aspect of Atari Corporation inspires debates to this day than the Atari/Commodore rivalry – or Atari/Amiga, that is. This is mainly due to the intertwined relationship between both companies, with Jack Tramiel being the head of both at different points in time. Unfortunately the truth is far more mundane than the exciting legends, which include stories of Jack buying Atari to get back at Commodore, Jack developing the ST in response to 'losing the Amiga', and a fanciful last-minute save when Commodore bought Amiga.

The truth is that Jack fully intended to retire after leaving Commodore, initially departing on a vacation around the world. Telling friends the only way he'd get back in was if the Japanese were coming into the market and he felt that nobody was strong enough to compete, by March those feelings got the best of him. Forming Tramel Technology Ltd, various key Commodore personnel left to join him. By April and May, Commodore engineers like Shiraz Shivji had also left and were holed up in a nondescript hotel room in California, designing the next computer that was never based around any Amiga technology. At the time when Jack purchased Atari Consumer, development of the ST was 90 per cent done.

Atari finally put out something more than an incremental computer update, the foremost being the 1040STE, although some would argue that it was too little, too late and should have been the main update several years before. Joining the 1040STE in 1989, however, were the Atari TT and Stacy laptop. The TT jumped Atari's computer offering into 32-bit territory as a high-end workstation, retailing for almost $3,000 when it hit the market the following year. The Stacy, while not Atari Corporation's first attempt at a portable computer, did represent its first attempt at bringing the ST into the laptop realm – or what passed for them at that time. Probably the most promising for the future of Atari Corporation in 1989 were relationships struck up with two British firms. First was Distributed Information Processing (DIP), which had managed to produce the world's first palmtop computer that was also fully compatible with MS-DOS. Licensing that and releasing it as the Atari Portfolio put the brand at the forefront of mobile computing at the time, if only for a little while.

The second relationship was with Flare Technology, a group of former Sinclair engineers who left to start their own company around developing an idea that they had for a multi-chip system that became the Flare One. By that time, the Super XE console had transformed into an advanced 32-bit system that leveraged ST technology with the short-lived Atari Transputer's graphics card. When Flare got involved, it had no sound and no name. Flare employee Martin Brennan suggested naming it after his wife's new car, the Panther Kallista, and the project received its last in a string of names: the Atari Panther. Three games were written on the unfinished platform along with some material that legendary British coder Jeff Minter had been coding, before Brennan talked Atari into abandoning the Panther for a 3D platform.

"While I was over in California in '89," begins Martin, "I actually convinced the bosses at Atari that 3D was the way to go, with the experience we'd gained on Flare One – if you didn't just do flat rendering but shaded rendering, you got a 3D appearance. At the time, I was seeing pictures in magazines where computers were rendering photorealistic 3D wire meshes and I said: 'These are static images, but they only contain a very low number of polygons. We could take that, animate it and you could produce a game that was a quantum leap away from the current games.'" And so, what was to be Atari's last games console, the Jaguar, was born on the strength of a promise made in 1989.

This is the end...

Microsoft's release of Windows 3.1 in 1992 began the dominance of the 'Wintel' (Windows running on Intel hardware) platform, and suddenly Atari and Amiga found their computers being relegated to the niche markets of music and video production respectively. Atari Corporation's 8-bit consoles and computers had become amoebic in sales, to the extent that support for all of them was dropped as of 1 January 1992. Atari tried to soldier on with further updates in the ST line via the Mega STE, the STBook laptop, and its final computer, the Atari Falcon. On the market for a year, its cancellation signified Atari leaving the computer industry altogether in favour of focusing on its Jaguar console.

Besides the limited computer sales, the Lynx was all but carrying Atari at the time. It had enjoyed decent sales, but this was the first device under Atari Corporation that



» [Jaguar] *Fight For Life* was created by Francois Bertrand, who worked on *Virtua Fighter*, it was panned on release.

"The company called it 'RIF', a quaint acronym for 'reduction in force'. We called it 'layoffs'"

BJ WEST, ART DIRECTOR AT ATARI CORPORATION, ON THE NOVEMBER 1995 LAYOFFS

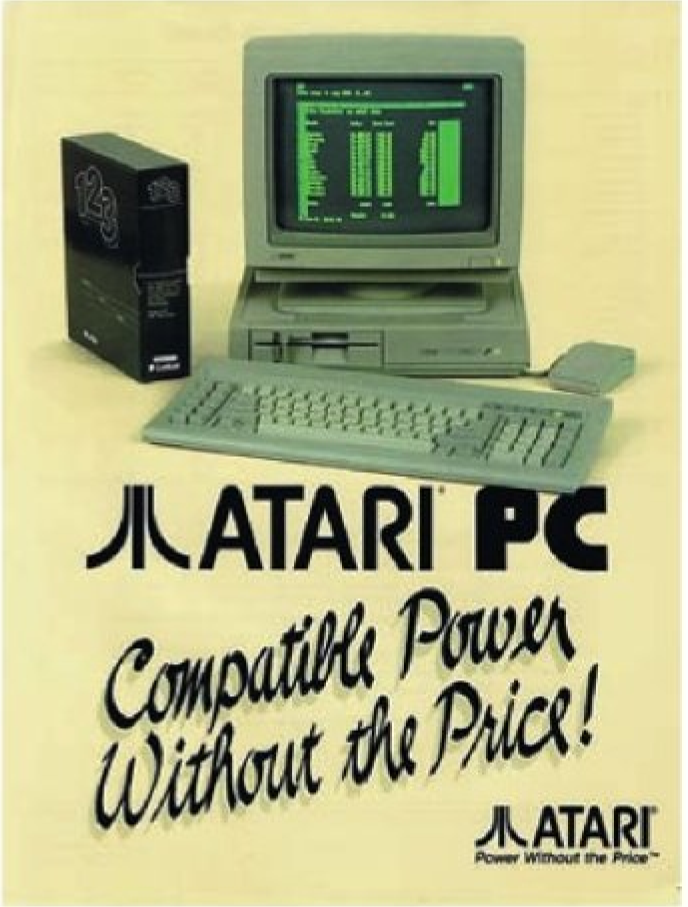






could not be delivered under its 'power without the price' slogan; the colour LCD screen assured that Sam Tramiel could not drop the price of the Lynx to be competitive with Nintendo's cheaper Game Boy. To Sam's credit, though, Atari still scored some major tie-ins like *Batman Returns*, for which a 15-minute Lynx commercial played in cinemas before screenings. He also managed to get placements for the Lynx in youth-oriented TV shows like *Full House* and *Parker Lewis Can't Lose*, as well as movies such as *If Looks Could Kill* (*Teen Agent*) and *Child's Play 3*. There was the multitude of licensed ports of coin-op games by Atari Corporation's now distant cousin, Atari Games, such as *APB*, *Gauntlet* and *S.T.U.N. Runner* as well. However, it was becoming apparent to Atari that it needed to focus on the Jaguar, which across 1993 and 1994 was generating the bulk of the company's sales.

That promise of a 3D games console future for Atari had manifested itself in the release of the Jaguar in late 1993, a complicated multiprocessor system with a mixture of 64-bit and 32-bit graphics and sound processing, along with a venerable 16-bit 68000 chip meant for bootstrapping, all of which should have been a crowning achievement. Instead, Atari forced Flair to rush to finish development of the custom hardware in 1991 and do product testing during 1992. The end result was some bugs in the hardware, a development manual written by Atari people who were not completely familiar with the architecture, and buggy and poorly written development software. A small internal game development budget and outrageous licensing and development fees for third-party developers made the best success repellant in the world. Many of the established publishers and studios stayed away from the platform, and those that didn't simply ignored its complex multiprocessor architecture in favour of using the 68000 as the main processor. Doing so instead of shutting it off after booting, which was the intended use, ensured that the Jaguar was limited to an expensive 16-bit machine for many games. In fact, some of the games were simply ported code from the 16-bit Genesis with graphics that fell far below the Jaguar's true capabilities.



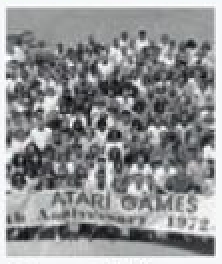
As Atari Corporation was releasing its overdue and hyped CD unit for the Jaguar in September of 1995, it found itself in the precarious position of being sandwiched between two 'next-gen' console releases: the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation. Both released the previous year in Japan and were becoming runaway successes in comparison, and the Jaguar's paltry offering of games that made little use of its hardware were already looking dated next to consoles that were just getting started. Sam Tramiel downplayed the rival systems and their capabilities in an interview in *Next Generation* magazine, which is now legendary for Sam seeming so out of touch with the reality of Atari's position.

The financial situation behind the scenes was dismal. By the end of 1995, Atari Corporation's sales declined by more than half, from $38.7 million in 1994 to $14.6 million in 1995. Since its introduction in 1993, Atari had only sold approximately 125,000 Jaguars – 100,000 by the end of 1994 and a mere 25,000 for all of 1995. And as low as it was, that 25,000 represented 76 per cent of the $14.6 million figure. In other words, the company was sinking fast because it had bet everything on the Jaguar.

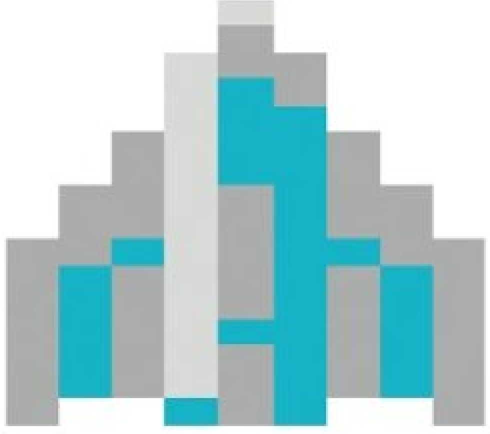
What also soon became apparent was that the weight of the company wasn't just on the Jaguar but almost squarely on Sam Tramiel as well. He suffered a heart attack, which in hindsight put the *Next Generation* interview in the light of a CEO desperately trying to keep up appearances.



THE 'OTHER' ATARI



Atari, Inc's coin division was spun off by Warner as Atari Games in 1984, and soon after it sold a controlling interest to Namco. In 1987 Hide Nakajima resigned from his Namco board position and, with Atari Games employees, bought 20 per cent of Namco's interest, essentially leaving the company under employee control. Under Nakajima, Atari Games entered the console arena as Tengen and also ended up suing Nintendo over its restrictive licensing practices. Namco sold out completely to Warner in 1990, giving it majority ownership, with Nakajima and employees selling out their remaining shares on 11 April 1994. Only a few months later, the coin-op brand's beloved Nakajima passed away from lung cancer. Under Warner, Atari Games became a subsidiary of Time Warner Interactive. In 1996 Atari Games was sold to WMS Industries subsidiary Williams Interactive, and was eventually transferred under fellow WMS subsidiary and soon to be spun off Midway Games. Midway eventually renamed Atari Games to Midway Games West before closing it down entirely on 7 February 2003.



After the heart attack, Jack came out of his retirement from daily operations and was met with a far different company to the one he'd left. Jack immediately significantly downsized the Jaguar programme in November of 1995, cancelling the cost-reduced combination of the Jaguar and CD unit called the CoJag and a more competitive Jaguar II. Major layoffs followed that month, as well as soon shutting down the Atari Interactive MS-DOS game-porting initiative and any other recent project efforts as well. By January he began looking for a way to sell off the company before it and the money coming in from recent lawsuits was completely gone. He found the answer in the up-and-coming hard drive manufacturer JT Storage.

The merger was announced on 13 February 1996 and occurred in June when Atari Corporation reverse merged with JTS to become a division of a new company called JTS Corporation. Jack and some of the other executives would become board members of this new company, and Jack got the approval of Atari Corporation shareholders based on the promise that Atari would continue operations after the merger. However, as layoffs continued, it became obvious that Jack simply intended to keep things going in as minimal a capacity as possible. The truth couldn't have been clearer than when 1997 rolled around and the Atari 'division' of JTS was a solitary person, John Skruch, at a single desk. Skruch was single-handedly handling any remaining Jaguar support, the Atari website and any licensing, such as Activision's acquisition of the rights to *Asteroids* and *Battlezone* to do updates the following year.

Shareholders launched a suit against Jack that continues to this day, claiming that he misrepresented the merger. However, in the interim it would solve nothing as JTS itself was quickly falling down a financial pit as well. The company sold off all the Atari Corporation properties and remaining warehouse stock to Hasbro on 28 February 1998 for only $5 million. Although it was the end of the Atari brand proper, it was almost fitting that the last employee left, the one to turn off the lights, was Skruch, who had been an employee of both Atari, Inc and Atari Corporation.

Special thanks to Leonard Tramiel, BJ West, John Skruch and Don Thomas.

RETROREVIVAL

UGH!

JUSTIFIED AND ANCIENT



» DRAGON 32
» SOFTEK INTERNATIONAL
» 1983

Look underneath your telly. How many consoles can you see? Now check your pockets for gaming devices. Then add in your PC and laptop and that's before we even start poking about in your loft for hardware once loved and now left to shiver in the rafters. Face it – you're spoiled.

Back in the early Eighties, unless you were related to Richard Branson, owning more than one machine was unthinkable. Perhaps that was why playground rivalries were so strong. Commodore, Sinclair, Acorn… you had to pick your side (or, at least, have it pick for you by your parents). Given the multitude of computers and consoles available, there was much pleasure to be had in visiting friends that had taken a different gaming route, either to wonder and drool at some unique title or scoff smugly at the inferiority of their machine compared to yours sitting at home.

Now, due to an epic fail on the part of his parents, my best friend Pete had a Dragon 32. I'd often go round to his house and together we'd bemoan the terrible joysticks and curse *Cuthbert In The Jungle* before decamping to my gaff to play something that was made by Llamasoft.

Then we discovered *UGH!* Ignoring the prehistoric inaccuracies of a cavemen co-existing with dinosaurs, we became wholly engrossed with outwitting the tyrannosaurus, dodging the rock-dropping pterodactyl and stealing his eggs, secreting them away in the dark recesses of our home cave. You could skewer your Jurassic foes with a trusty spear but could only carry one thing at a time, meaning you were frequently defenceless, requiring many well-timed dashes along the restrictive mountain paths.

The game had the simple, twitchy appeal of a Game and Watch title or, more obviously, the much loved Grandstand tabletop *Caveman*. We loved it and it made us love the Dragon, too.

I was genuinely saddened when the game appeared on the Spectrum and the C64, the latter even receiving a multi-screened sequel in the form of *Firequest*. There was no longer a reason to play with Pete's Dragon and soon it went the way of the dinosaurs… *







>> It's another quiet month for games, but there are some crackers to enjoy. Deus Ex's prequel finally arrives, while Capcom's enhanced online update of Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike also takes a bow. Be sure to join us online for some fisticuffs

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike
This is a great update with a host of genuinely excellent new features. Well worth it.



STUART
Deus Ex: Human Revolution
It's not up to the high standards of the original *Deus Ex*, but it's still very good.



DAVID
From Dust
I've been waiting a very long time for Eric Chahi's new game. I'm not disappointed.

>> DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

MORE EVOLUTION THAN REVOLUTION

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC, PS3
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £44.99
- **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- **DEVELOPER:** EIDOS MONTREAL
- **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» Written by Harvey Smith and Warren Spector, and released in 2000 by Ion Storm, *Deus Ex* is an award-winning FPS with a cyberpunk theme that featured RPG elements. The sequel, *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, was released for the PC and Xbox in 2003.

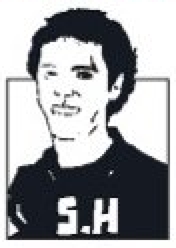
✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
DEUS EX (PC)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION (360)





The original *Deus Ex* is one of the best first-person shooters of all time: a deep, engrossing and genre-breaking cyberpunk adventure boasting a gripping, sophisticated story and award-winning gameplay. It would be fair to say, then, that *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, a prequel set 25 years before the events of the first game, certainly has a lot to live up to.

In this latest instalment, you play the role of Adam Jensen, a gruff Christian Bale soundalike who is wasting his Hollywood vocal talent working as head of security of a top biotech firm. When the company Jensen is employed by is attacked by a team of shadowy mercenaries, the company's top researchers are killed and Jensen is left mortally wounded. His life is saved when his employer patches him up with a whole bunch of cutting-edge augmentations and body toys.

Though we wouldn't want to give the finer details of the story away, upon returning to work Jensen becomes something of a superhuman gumshoe, tasked with leading the investigation into who was responsible for the attack. Subsequent events then start to brush against some familiar sci-fi territory, from *Ghost In The Shell* and *Appleseed* to *Metal Gear Solid*, as *Human Revolution* begins to spin its own captivating tale centring on the morality of cybernetics and its impact on society. While the core narrative points follow a mostly linear path, with optional unsubtle and secret side quests, how Jensen can go about completing his core objectives does not. One minute he might be trying to charm people to his will using considered chat, looking for a discreet way to enter a heavily fortified building, and hacking into a computer to shut down its security systems; the next he's slipping past guards behind crates and furniture, most of which can be picked up and repositioned so as to allow you to form your own cover, or disposing of foes quietly and efficiently so as not to draw any unwanted attention.

As well as how you approach certain situations, your freedom is extended to customising weapons and even Jensen himself. Power cells called Praxis, earned by boosting XP for completion of objectives, found by exploring levels, or purchased in clinics dotted around the city hub areas that bookend certain missions, can be used to upgrade a number of augmentations around Jensen's body. You can enhance his brain to level up his hacking or persuasion skills, or you might decide to enhance his legs to make him run faster or be able to fall safely from any height.

At its heart, then, *Human Revolution*'s overall design does feel leveraged more towards an action stealth game than an FPS. Ammo and weapon drops are sparse



» [360] During melee attacks you can either knock out enemies or kill them. Obviously killing them is a little noisier.



» [360] Weapons are fully customisable. Purchase, sell and enhance them through merchants.



» [360] The conversation system is similar to what you'll have seen in recent Western RPGs and has a real impact on events.



GO DEEPER

The facts behind Deus Ex: Human Revolution

>> *Human Revolution* marks the first game in the franchise to have not been designed by Warren Spector or Harvey Smith

>> The music was composed by the award-winning Michael McCann, whose previous credits include *Tom Clancy's EndWar* and *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*

>> Some of Jensen's niftier augmentations include a useful cloaking ability and the power to punch through concrete walls



» [360] AI isn't the sharpest thing in this game. They don't seem to be all that aware of what's going on.



Happy hacking

NO CYBERPUNK ADVENTURE would be complete without a nice dollop of hacking, and *Human Revolution* has this well covered with one of the most entertaining hacking mechanics we've seen in a videogame since… well, ever. How it works is you must navigate the network and successfully capture a series of nodes that lead to a computer's datastore, which contains the entry codes and allows access to the security systems. However, if alerted the system will then try to locate the source of the breach and kick you out, unless you act fast to finish the job. It's pretty tense but also weirdly addictive at the same time.

OPINION



Even if the boss fights can be infuriating at times, and the AI is rather underwhelming, this is still a worthy addition to the *Deus Ex* canon. The visuals perfectly capture the cyberpunk genre, there are plenty of interesting characters to meet, and the storyline is full of exciting twists and turns. It doesn't reach the high standards of the original, but how many games do?

Darran Jones

– be sure to visit merchants to stock up and customise your guns regularly if that's your approach – and Jensen's augmentations encourage you to apply a more methodical approach to the game as well.

Aesthetically, there is no doubt that *Human Revolution* looks the part, but this highlights the first of a small number of issues we had with it. Though it's clear that a lot of time and effort has been spent to craft a well-realised cyberpunk universe that is brilliantly fleshed out and rewards exploration, there are some presentational issues that tarnish the immersion and seem to date the overall design.

Actions such as guard takedowns and ladder climbing are canned, locked-in animations, which sometimes draw you out of the experience and remind you that you are playing a videogame, and there is also a small selection of frustrating – and unnecessary, we'd argue – boss fights to circumvent, something that rarely works in FPSs for the reasons that *Human Revolution* will aptly highlight. Sometimes it feels a little last-generation in its design, like an Xbox era game fitted with burnished Xbox 360 augmentations.

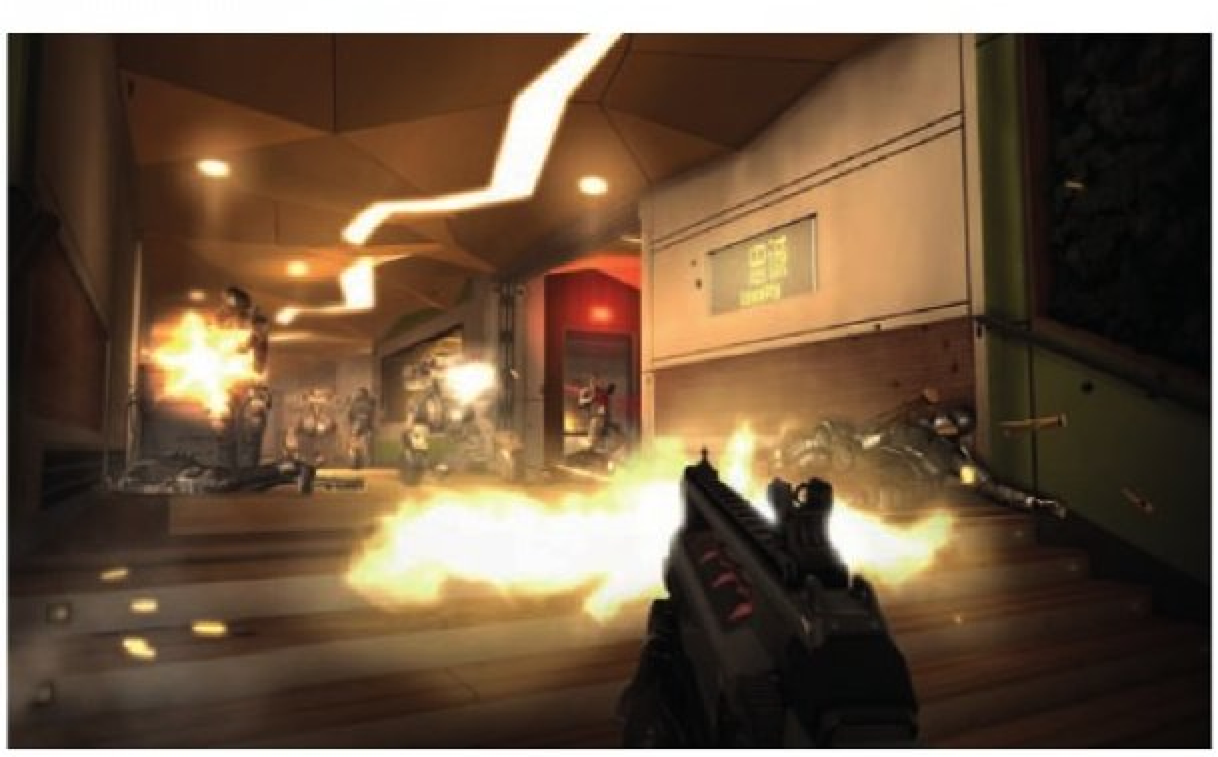
This strangely antiquated undercurrent becomes most apparent with enemy AI. Guards will follow a pretty rigid routine during their patrols and are quick to give up chase when Jensen is spotted. And while there's an argument that their laziness does help keep the game flowing at a nice pace, it is a fine balancing act that has been better handled in other stealth-action games, most notably in the *Hitman* titles. Here it comes across a little *Metal Gear Solid*, with a number of occasions where we successfully escaped a gunfight simply by running into an empty room and then closing the door behind us, or a guard would give up trying to find us despite seeing us dash behind a crate just a few metres away.

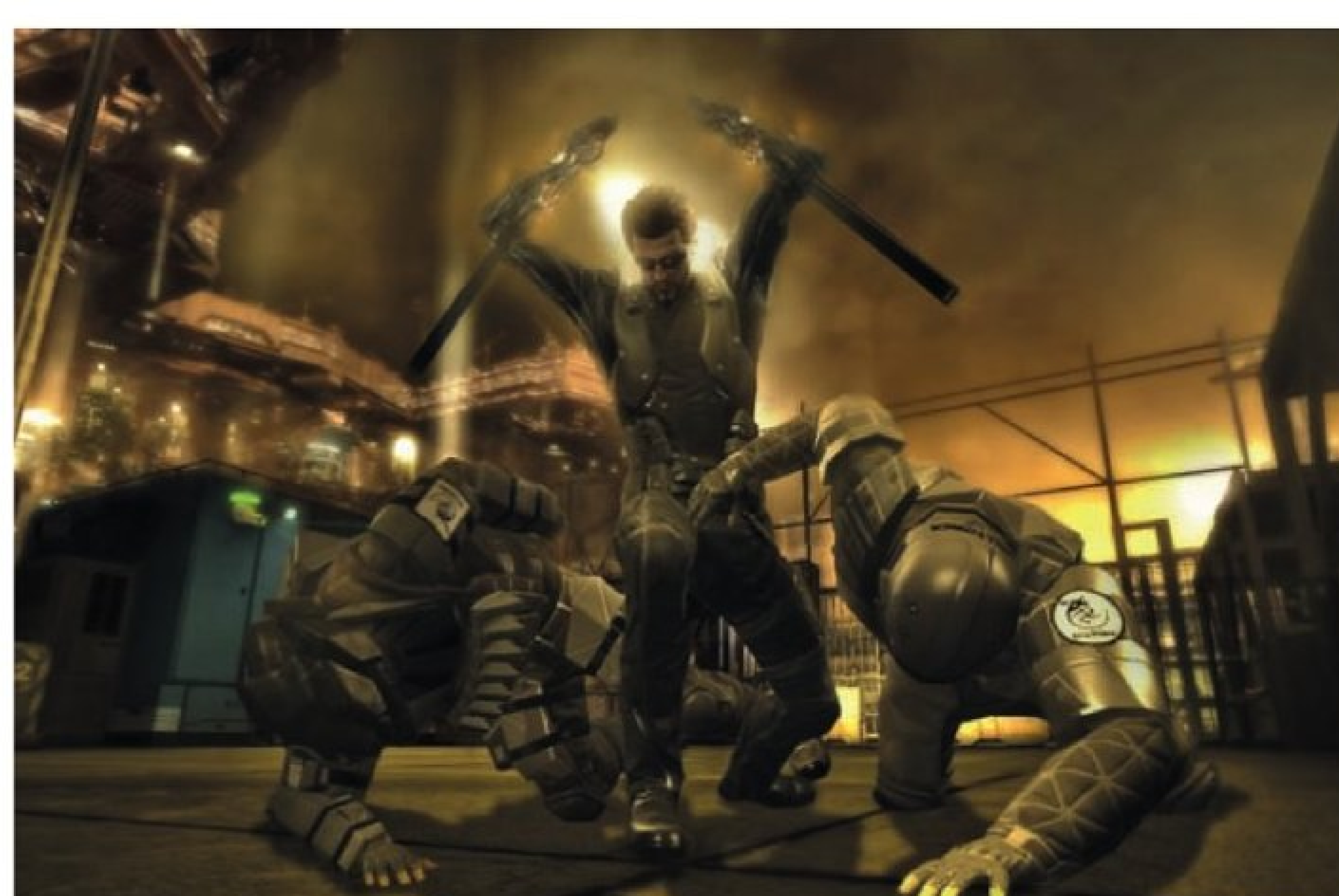
These little annoyances aside, though, there's no doubt that *Human Revolution* is a solid, compelling and well-designed game. It's one that keeps and evolves the salient gameplay pillars from the original classic and uses them to support a thoroughly engaging story that will have fans hooked until its conclusion.

In a nutshell

***Deus Ex: Human Revolution* is an engaging experience and solid prequel, but its future world can feel a tad dated at times. It's certainly more sophisticated than most other FPSs out there, though, and *Deus Ex* fans won't be disappointed.**

>> Score **84%**

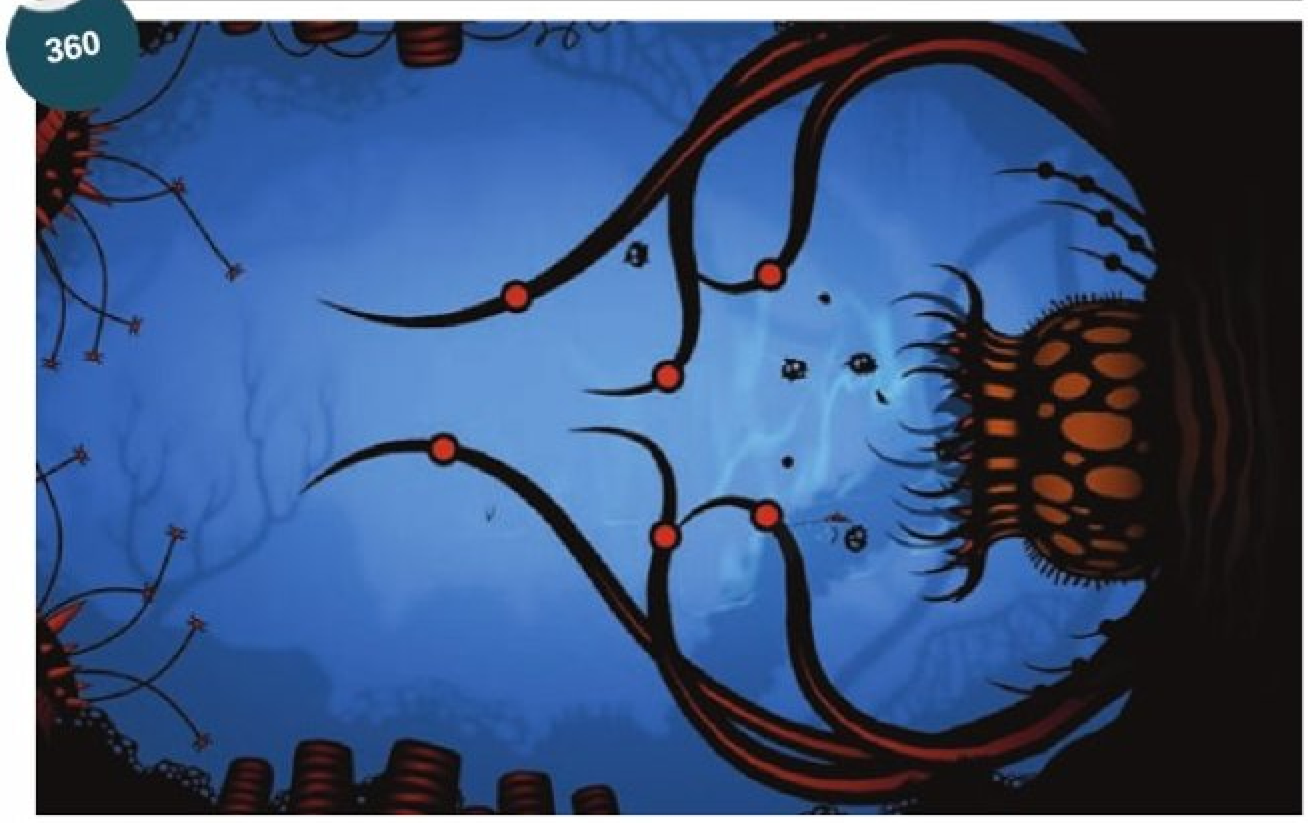




Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR…

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS (£10.60) » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** SHADOW PLANET PRODUCTIONS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4



» [Xbox 360] Some bosses are quite inventive, requiring both dexterity and lateral thinking to defeat them.

We've been desperate to play this new Summer of Arcade release. After all, it combines classic Metroidvania gameplay with shoot-'em-up mechanics – a recipe for success if ever there was one.

Well actually no. While a shmuptroidvania – our own term so don't nick it – sounds amazing on paper, the end result isn't quite as wondrous, and although there are moments of sheer brilliance in Shadow Planet Productions' game, it's let down in a few key areas.

This is a shame, as the concept itself – you control a flying saucer that gains more unique weaponry as it delves deeper into the shadow planet – is certainly a sound one. The problem is that the execution throughout is nowhere near as polished as its beautifully abstract visuals, and aside from some genuinely



infuriating puzzles, this is very much a Metroidvania on autopilot. All the body parts are there, but the heart isn't pumping any life into them.

Weapons are slowly introduced and assigned to a wheel, where they can easily be selected with the right stick, and range from spiked wheels to laser beams and magnets, but many of them are either underused or just not that interesting in the first place. It's also far too linear for a Metroidvania game, meaning that there's no real sense of excitement or discovery whenever you unlock a weapon that allows you access to a new area.

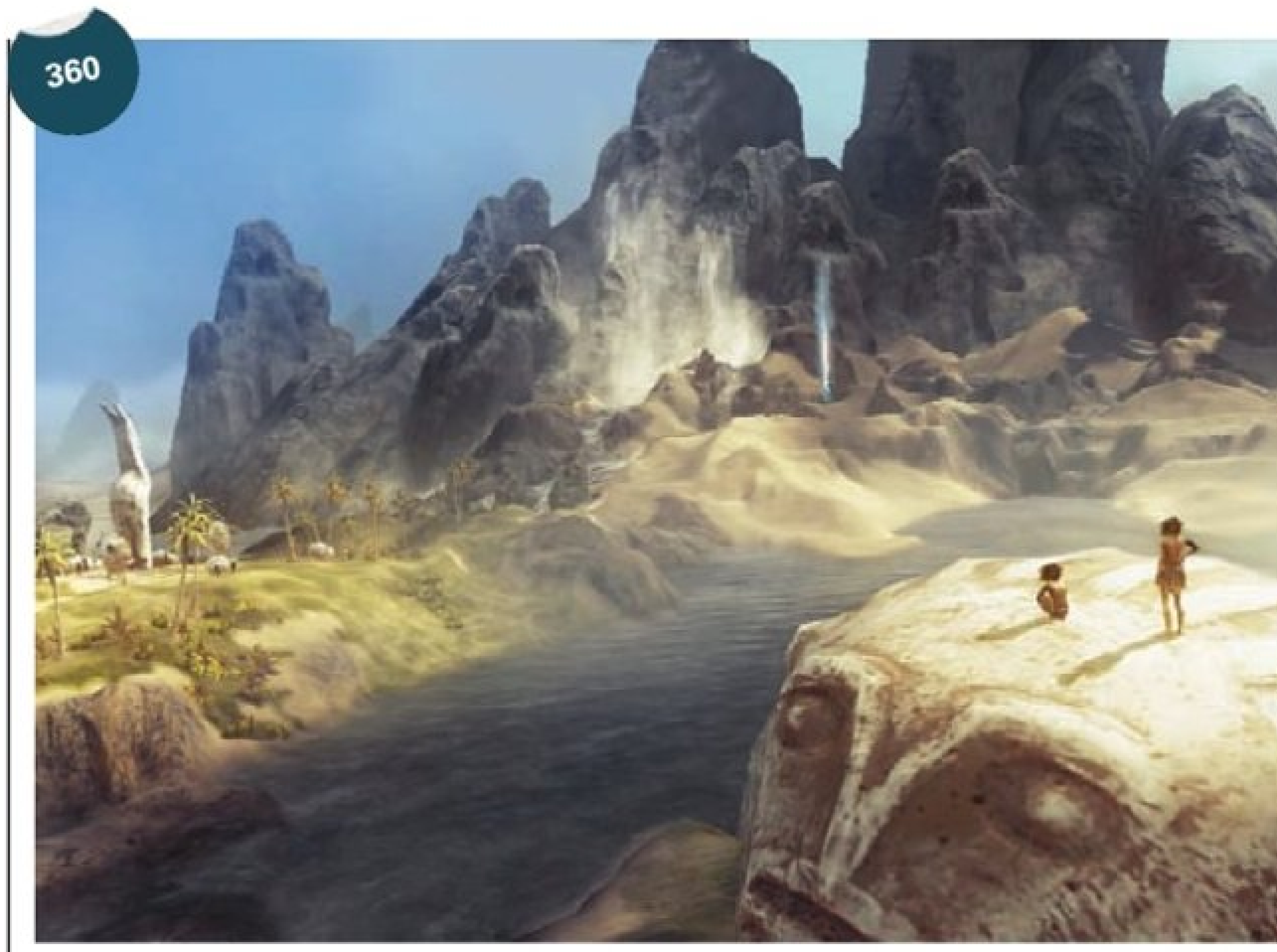
Painfully brief unless you're prepared to uncover every last item and let down by some dull final levels, *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet* best comes alive in its challenging multiplayer mode. Otherwise it's a beautiful disappointment.

OPINION

There's no denying that *Insanely Twisted Shadow Planet* is a gorgeous game, but looks can only get you so far. Beneath its glossy exterior is a surprisingly straightforward adventure. It's fun, but it's a little too lightweight compared to the games it desperately wants to emulate.

Stuart Hunt

>> Score **68%**



» [Xbox 360] Totems are always tantalisingly out of reach, meaning you need to get creative with your summoning.

From Dust

PLAY GOD WITHOUT LEAVING YOUR ARMCHAIR

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS (£10.60) » **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT » **DEVELOPER:** UBISOFT MONTPELLIER » **PLAYERS:** 1

Eric Chahi's latest creation is deceiving, for beneath its impressive real-time physics engine is a resoundingly old-school god sim that has us yearning for the good old days. Mixing elements of *Lemmings*, *Populous* and *Magic Carpet*, to name just a few, *From Dust* is a highly entertaining sandbox title that enables you to shape the world of a rag-tag group of faithful followers.

From Dust's game mechanics focus around the use of breath. The left trigger sucks an element up – be it water, earth or lava – while the right trigger expels it. It's a beautifully simple mechanic that enables you to deplete lakes, quench fires or build dams, and numerous other tasks.

Each stage has you protecting a small group of followers who are seeking out their old lifestyle. This is done *Lemmings*-style by leading them to a checkpoint – typically a totem or



portal – and using your environmental manipulation skills to keep them safe. Certain totems unleash unique powers when captured, ranging from the ability to instantly put out all fires to protecting your village from water, which subtly build upon the original, seemingly simple core mechanics.

Visually arresting, it looks and sounds like a cross between *Panzer Dragoon* and the aforementioned *Magic Carpet*. It's a delightfully abstract game whose strength comes in the way you're given complete freedom to tackle each task. *From Dust*'s campaign is supplemented by some entertaining time-based challenge modes, which often cause you to rethink how you use your breath's powers. Eric Chahi may have been in self-imposed exile for the last 14 years, but *From Dust* is proof that he still knows how to create great games.

OPINION

It took a while for me to get my head around grabbing and dumping elements, but once it gels, *From Dust* reveals itself to be an extremely clever game. It's a little lacking in variety, but the power it offers you to play around with is tremendously satisfying.

Darran Jones

>> Score **87%**

Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike Online Edition

GAMING'S BEST 2D FIGHTER GETS A LITTLE BETTER

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £11.99 » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM » **DEVELOPER:** IRON GALAXY » **PLAYERS:** 1-8



PS3

» [PS3] The simulated arcade cabinet view is cute but unlikely to be used for long.

D.J

***Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* has slowly built up a deserved reputation as being the best 2D fighter of all time. It's now possible to see what all the fuss is about thanks to an impressive new update for PSN and Xbox Live Arcade.**

While the new HD graphics mode looks ugly as sin, smearing the detail out of all the beautiful sprite work, it can fortunately be turned off. The same can't be said for the new HUD, but it's a small price to pay. Of course, this isn't the first time that *3rd Strike* has appeared on home consoles after ports to the Dreamcast, Xbox and PS2, but it's easily the best thanks to solid netplay and a number of new features.

There is a brand new trial mode to enjoy, which features a huge number of challenges to complete, online eight-player tournaments, the ability to directly upload replays to YouTube, and plenty of additional content to unlock.

Even with all the cool extras, though, *3rd Strike* remains an incredible fighter thanks to its exotic character roster, superb gameplay mechanics and the excellent parry system, which is instantly accessible but takes an age to truly master. Yes, there are imbalances within the roster – Ken is utterly cheap to play with and against – but the sheer variety of fighting styles, inventive character design and amazingly deep gameplay certainly makes up for it.

Capcom often gets criticised for cashing in on past glories, but *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* really has been given a spectacular makeover. The king of 2D fighters is set to dominate your precious time all over again.

>> Score **96%**



OPINION

S.H

I'd have been perfectly happy with a straight port of *3rd Strike*, so it's pleasing to see that Capcom and Iron Galaxy have gone the extra mile with this long-awaited update. This is an excellent new version that breathes fresh life into a classic game.

Stuart Hunt



iOS

Chuck's Challenge

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** FREE » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **This is *Chip's Challenge*** in all but name, and we're delighted to say that it's still excellent fun to play. Creator Chuck Sommerville has introduced plenty of new mechanics to explore, and there's a wealth of content and sensibly priced expansions. Daily puzzles are included; there are a variety of good control methods on offer, while the included level editor will ensure that you always have something to play.

>> Score **87%**



PS3

Williams Pinball Classics

» **SYSTEM:** PS3
» **PRICE:** £29.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **System 3's excellent** pinball compilation finally gets a home version and it's worth the wait. The tables look glorious in HD, there are three new ones that weren't in the PSP version, and the physics are of an extremely high standard. Online leaderboards are included and there's a clever credit system that rewards continual play.

>> Score **90%**



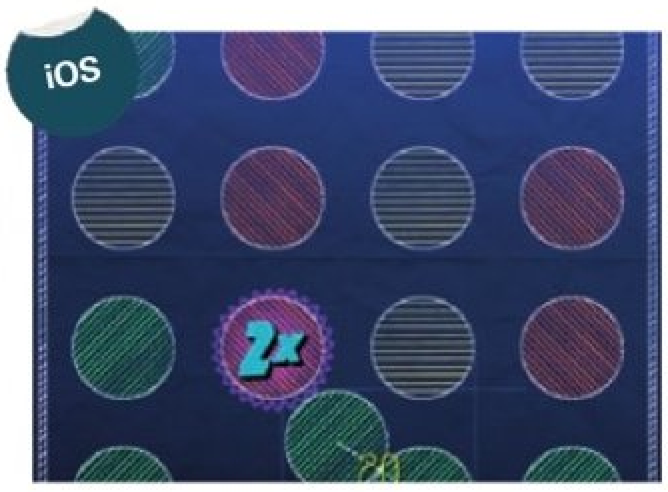
iOS

Tekken Bowl

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** FREE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Fans of *Tekken*'s** bowling mini-game will be pleased to find it replicated for iOS. Controls are very straightforward, there's a fun puzzle mode where you have a set number of balls to complete challenges, and the pass and play feature always makes for limited multiplayer fun. It's enjoyable enough for a while, but a lack of CPU opponents and sloppy presentation let it down, even though it is free.

>> Score **55%**



iOS

Magnetic Billiards: Blueprint

» **SYSTEM:** iOS
» **PRICE:** £0.69 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **The Pickford brothers'** new game boasts great design and slick presentation. The aim is to clear balls in as few moves as possible, and you get rewarded for making outlandish shots. It's addictive, as you constantly feel you can improve on each shot. Additional modes are available for a fee, but there's more than enough for your initial outlay.

>> Score **82%**

RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

✱DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

Streets Of Rage 2

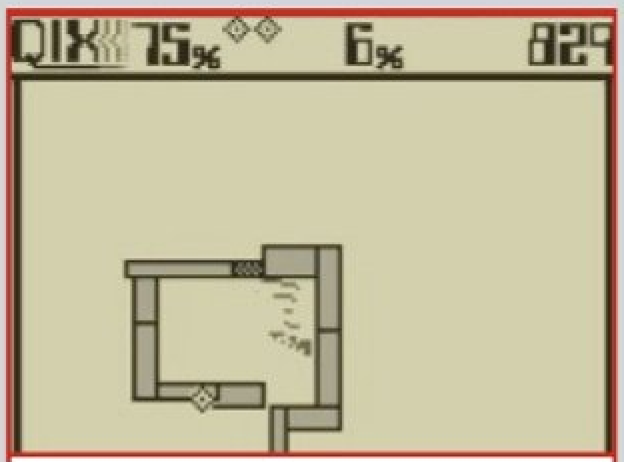
INFORMATION
- **System:** Mega Drive
- **Buy it for:** £3.99
- **Buy it from:** PSN
- **Score:** ★★★★★



As rumours spread about *Streets Of Rage*'s resurrection (it celebrates its 20th birthday this year), we've been enjoying the excellent sequel on our PlayStation 3. It's certainly taken its sweet time to arrive on Sony's digital download service (it was released on Xbox Live Arcade back in 2007) but the end result is certainly worth it. While we've never gelled with the introduction of newcomer Max (he's far too slow and ponderous for our liking) everything else about *Streets Of Rage 2* is absolutely superb.

The pacing throughout is brilliant, with a constant stream of hardened enemies to fight, which are full of variety. There's a marvellous range of special moves to enjoy, while combat still feels satisfyingly brutal, as you smack your way through the gaudy streets. Add in some genuinely tough bosses and another stunning soundtrack from Yuzo Koshiro and Sega's sequel remains the best scrolling fighter you're ever likely to play.

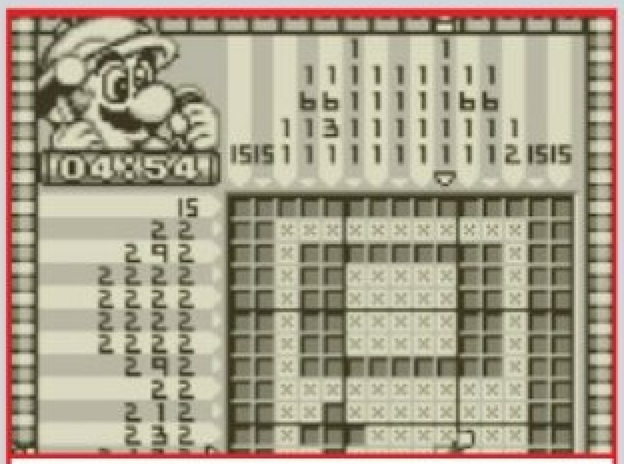
>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



QIX
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £2.70
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★★★★★
- First released in 1981, Taito's *QIX* is a game that still delights and infuriates us in equal measure. Playing like an inverted version of *Amidar*, this Game Boy adaptation is a cracking conversion that still holds up 20 years after its original release. Yes, all you're doing is drawing boxes while avoiding enemies, but it still remains a ridiculously compelling experience that always offers a stiff challenge.



Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** $9.99 (£6.20)
- **Buy it from:** gog.com/Steam
- **Score:** ★★★★★
- It pains us that *Stranger's Wrath* never gets the praise it deserves, because it really is an excellent and innovative addition to the *Oddworld* franchise. Graphically Stranger's Wrath holds up extremely well, with lovely organic levels and smart character design, but it's the live weapon system and the inventive way that you use it that makes *Stranger's Wrath* stand apart from its peers.



Mario's Picross
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £3.60
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★★★★☆
- If you've never played *Picross* then this Game Boy offering is the perfect place to start. While it features the now standard *Mario* tax (making it a good £1 more expensive then other Game Boy games on the service) its carefully constructed puzzles and quaint imagery do keep you hooked. It's not as taxing as the later DS versions, but it still manages to offer excellent value for money.



Game & Watch Gallery
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £2.70
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★★★★☆
- While there's a range of Game & Watch games on DSiWare, this little compilation is still worthy of your time. There are four games on offer: *Manhole*, *Fire*, *Octopus* and *Oil Panic*, and they feature both classic and revised updates. *Oil Panic* suffers on the authenticity side due to the Game Boy's resolution, but the remaining three games are cracking conversions. Highly recommended.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Nintendo forgets to release any Wii games this month, but at least showers the 3DS with digital love

Avenging Spirit
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £2.70
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Pac-Man
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £3.60
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Baseball
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £2.70
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★☆☆☆☆

Fortified Zone
- **System:** Game Boy
- **Buy it for:** £2.70
- **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
- **Score:** ★★★☆☆

▼ PC SERVICES

There is a fairly average selection of retro downloadable PC titles this month, although returning to *Realms Of The Haunting* has been nice.

Zork: Grand Inquisitor
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Soulbringer
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** €3.99 (£3.50)
- **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Slipstream 5000
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

Normality
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
- **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
- **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Realms Of The Haunting
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** €3.99 (£3.50)
- **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- **Score:** ★★★★☆

UFO Aftershock
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** €8.99 (£7.90)
- **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Stronghold
- **System:** PC
- **Buy it for:** €3.99 (£3.50)
- **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
- **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

▼ PSN

Finally, a new Neo Geo game from SNK. We need more, though, much, much more. Here's hoping SNK listens to us.

King OF Fighters '95
- **System:** Neo Geo
- **Buy it for:** £7.19
- **Buy it from:** PSN
- **Score:** ★★★★☆

Ducati Challenge
- **System:** PSOne
- **Buy it for:** £3.99
- **Buy it from:** PSN
- **Score:** ★☆☆☆☆

Golden Axe
- **System:** Arcade
- **Buy it for:** £3.99
- **Buy it from:** PSN
- **Score:** ★★★★☆

Sonic The Hedgehog 2
- **System:** Mega Drive
- **Buy it for:** £3.99
- **Buy it from:** PSN
- **Score:** ★★★★☆



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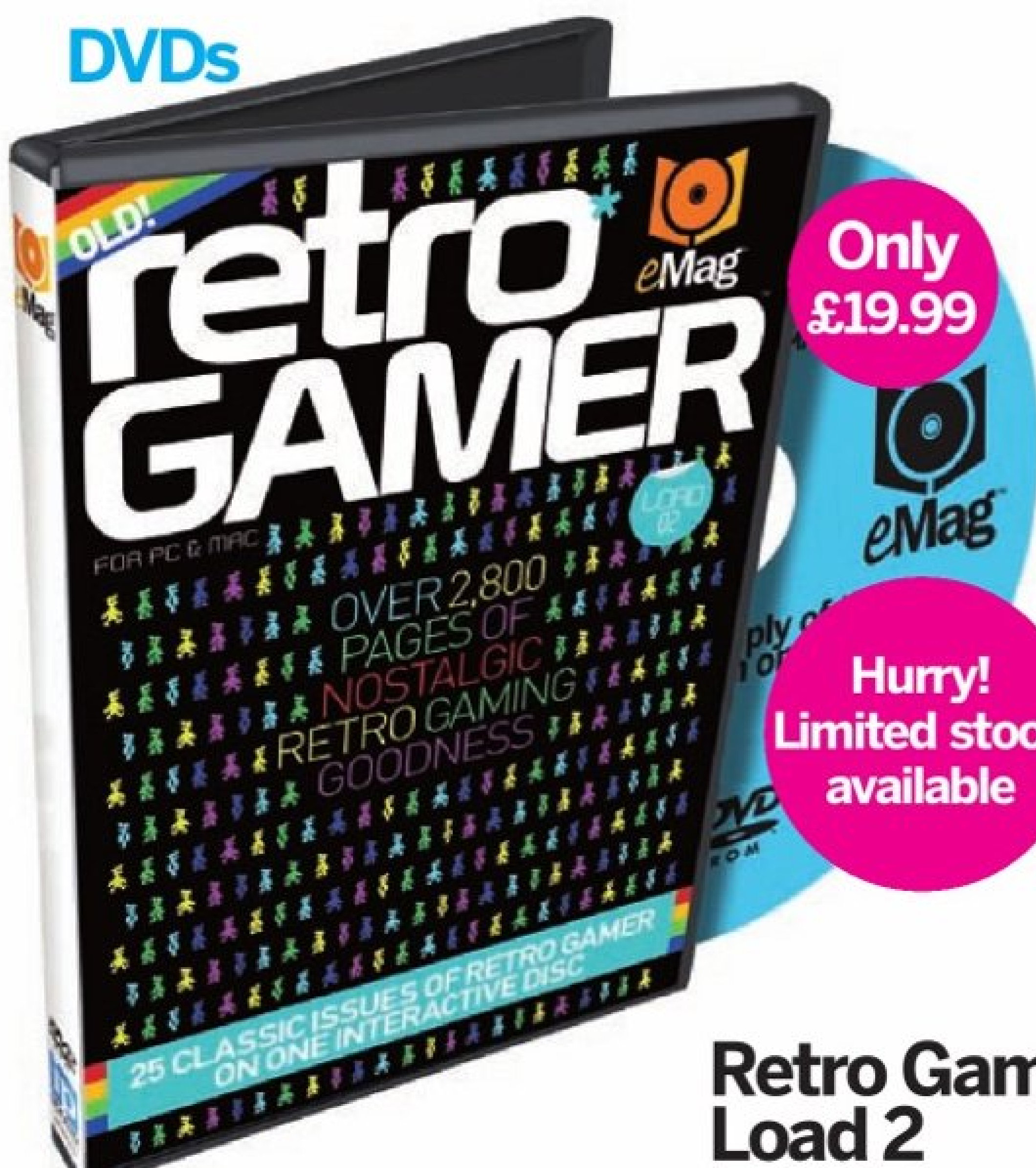


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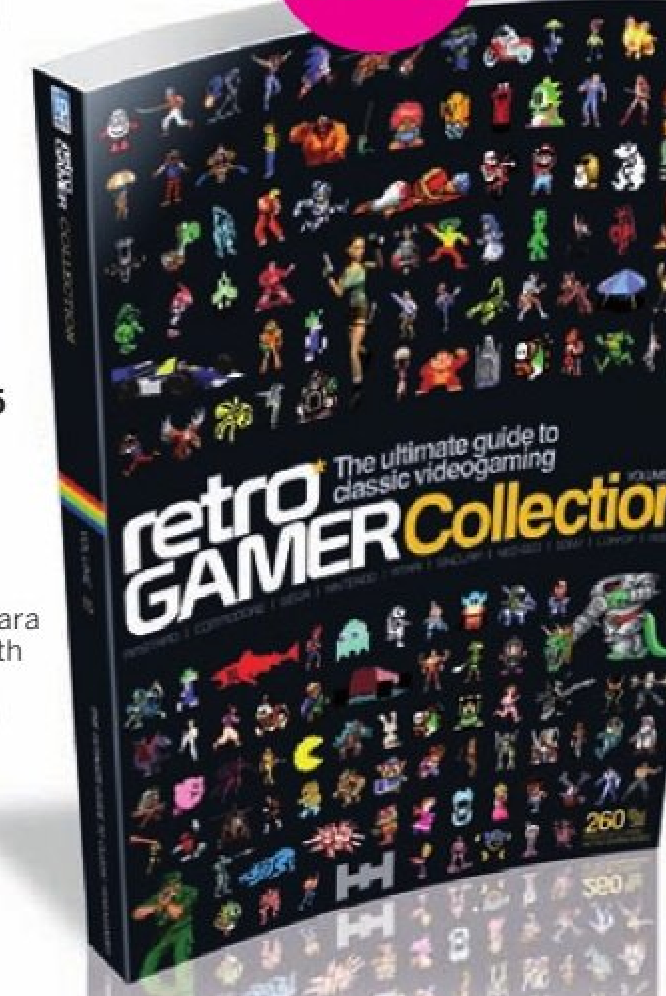


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HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



Space Harrier presented a small dilemma this month. When screenshots are required for Atari 8-bit games I've previously just dumped them out of Atari800Win, but that simply wouldn't have worked with the interleaved display used here. Instead we've gone for the more powerful Altirra, with its frame-blending option enabled, which is far more representative of what Atari owners will see during play



» **FORMAT:** ATARI 8-BIT

» **DEVELOPED BY:** CHRIS 'SHEDDY' HUTT

» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/HARRIER-A8 OR SHEDDYSHACK.CO.UK

» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011

» **PRICE:** TBA (CARTRIDGE) OR FREE DOWNLOAD (ROM)

SPACE HARRIER

WELCOME TO THE FANTASY ZONE. GET READY!



» [Atari 8-bit] Dragon the boss fight out.





***Space Harrier* was a behemoth of a coin-op, mounted on hydraulics and packed to the brim with state-of-the-art hardware. It tucked a combined jet engine and weapon under the player's arm and sent them off on a high-speed journey through the Fantasy Zone, blasting or dodging between the landscape and its inhabitants, which included flying insects, several aircraft, assorted species of dragon, giant robots and even one-eyed mammoths.**

And, after noticing the popularity of *Space Harrier* in the arcades and how its bright visuals and high-quality sounds captured the attention of players, a couple of brave – or perhaps foolish would be more appropriate – developers approached Sega about producing home conversions for machines with a lot less power under the hood. Only some of the 8-bit machines were to receive a version, and among those not blessed was the Atari home computer series. Well, we're over a quarter of a century down the line and it's taken just shy of a decade of that time to actually develop, but now the Atari not only has its own version of *Space Harrier*, but it's among the best 8-bit implementations ever to be released!

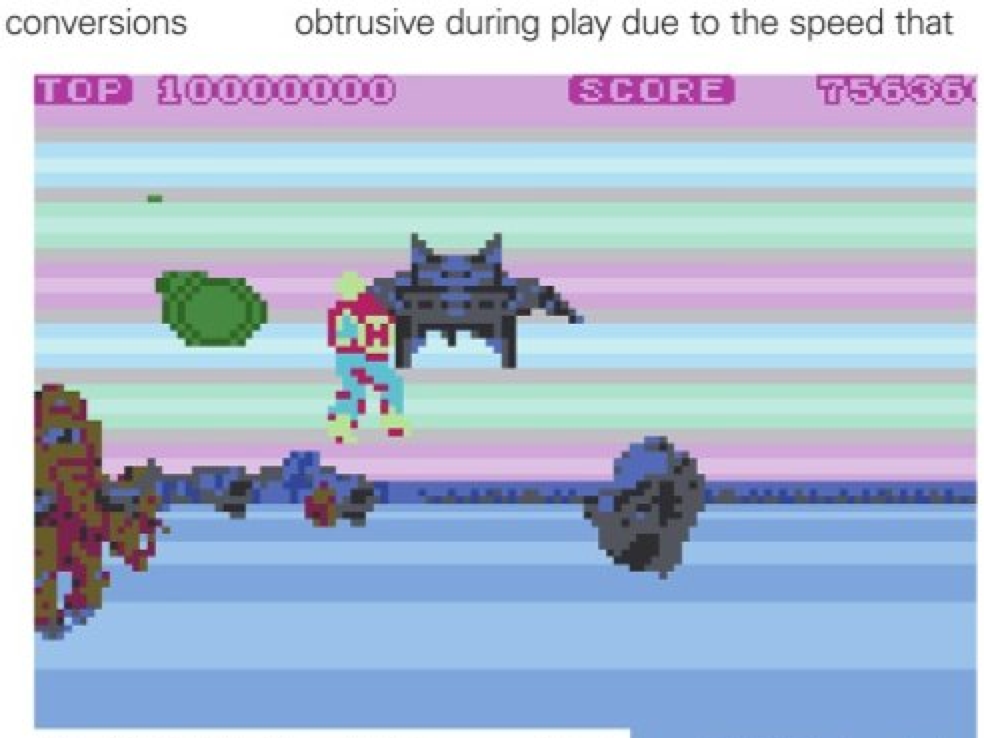
A truly startling amount of care and attention has been lavished on *Space Harrier* for the Atari 8-bit. The graphics have been converted very well and, although the frame-interleaving technique that has been used to produce extra colours makes the foregrounds a little dark and adds some flickering to the display, it doesn't become obtrusive during play due to the speed that everything is moving around. The sound is equally solid, with conversions of the entire arcade soundtrack by Sal Esquivel playing in the background, solid spot effects that are triggered where the coin-op would have played them, and even the speech, welcoming players to the Fantasy Zone and warning them to get ready. The nicest inclusion of all has to be the bonus stages, which were absent from most of the 8-bit conversions, where a friendly dragon called Uriah gives the player a ride through the previously completed stages, flattening the backgrounds as they go.

Of course, it wouldn't be entirely fair to compare this to what Elite and the other developers released back in the Eighties; developer Chris 'Sheddy' Hutt has put in as many years as they would have been given weeks to squeeze every last drop of juice out of his Atari 8-bit and, since he wanted the game working on a standard 64K machine, it had to arrive taking up all the storage space on an 8-megabit cartridge. *Space Harrier* fans and indeed anybody who enjoys a decent rail shooter should get their money's worth because, with difficulty options and a neat level select feature from the title screen, this is a well balanced, polished implementation of Sega's classic game on the Atari, and the developer's dedication to both platform and subject matter are discernible from the moment the logo spins towards the screen.

94%



» [Atari 8-bit] Landscape gardening with Uriah.



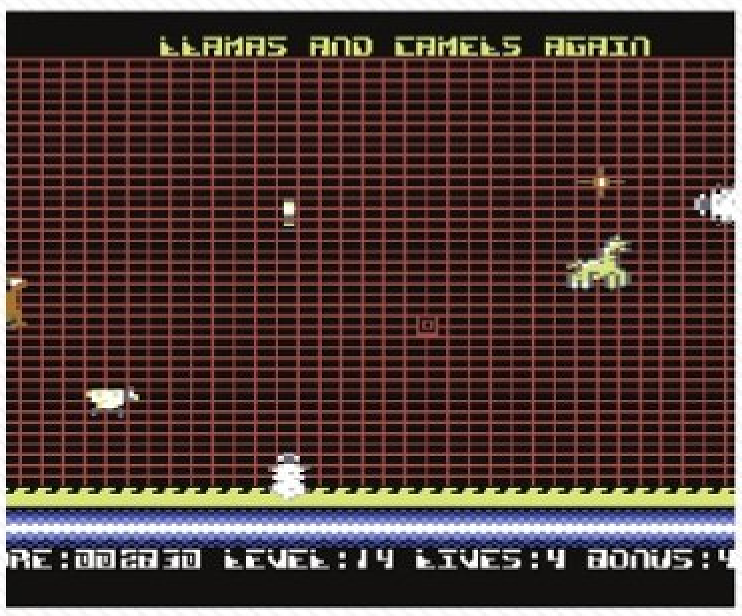
» [Atari 8-bit] Finishing *Space Harrier* is a mammoth task.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

SHEEPOID

» **FORMAT:** C64 » **DEVELOPER:** RICHARD BAYLISS » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SHEEPOID
» **PRICE:** £3.99 (TAPE), £4.99 (DISK), £9.99 (PREMIUM DISK) OR FREE DOWNLOAD



» [C64] No sense bleating about it.

Using hybrid sheep as weapons might sound odd, but with calculators, mutant camels and floppy disks among the assailants in *Sheepoid* and the game itself being a tribute to Jeff Minter, it pretty much makes sense. The player is handed control of two Sheepoids, one for each axis of the joystick, which make up the neon vortex defence grid.

The screen layout is reminiscent of *Laser Zone*, but *Sheepoid* also has features in common with another Minter blaster called *Hellgate*. The firing angle of one gun can't be altered to defend the other as with *Laser Zone*, and there are lambs akin to *Hellgate*'s goats dashing across the playfield that decrease the score if shot.

Sheepoid is fun but not perfect, and the movement in particular is clunkier than Commodore 64 fans have come to expect. Trying before buying is advised via the free download available at Psytronik's website.

62%

THE KEEP

» **FORMAT:** UNEXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE MCCREA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/THE-KEEP » **PRICE:** FREE

The Keep is a vast stone edifice in need of exploration, and one brave adventurer must enter its hallways with only a failing torch to light his path and a self-drawing map. Each level is a labyrinth of corridors, with the occasional locked doorway acting as a barrier until one of the all-purpose keys is found. Finding the staircase to the next floor serves up a little extra fuel to keep the torch alight; if it conks out completely the player is plunged into darkness and invariably eaten to death.

The on-screen window isn't much bigger than a postage stamp and wedging 256 levels in was probably overkill – very few players will ever explore that far and the limited number of wall textures will become very repetitive – but *The Keep* is still amusing to wander around and hopefully a sign of great things to come on the VIC-20.

73%

» [VIC-20] Is it so wrong to be human after all?




» [Plus/4] That daring young man.

LODE RUNNER

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE PLUS/4 » **DEVELOPER:** THE ASSASSINS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/LODE-PLUS4 » **PRICE:** FREE

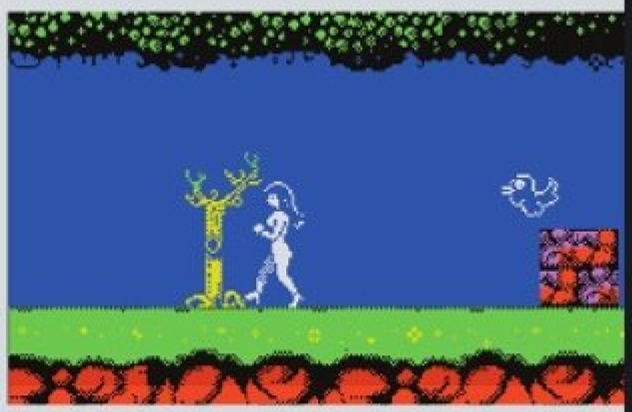
The idea behind *Lode Runner* is simple: each level is a treasure room belonging to the evil Bungeling Empire and guarded by their minions, so you, as the Lode Runner, want to make a withdrawal. Avoid being captured while dashing around the platforms to grab money boxes and, once a room is emptied of bling, a ladder will materialise heading upwards towards the next. If one of the guards gets too close, some of the ground can be dug away temporarily to form a trap.

As conversions go, KiCHY's *Lode Runner* on the Plus/4 has been based on source code that was recently constructed from the C64 port, so it's probably about as spot-on as anything like this is ever going to be. The graphics and sound are, unsurprisingly considering their age, a little sparse but functional, and there are buckets of game options available, including an integrated level editor on the off chance that the 150 challenging levels originally produced by Brøderbund should ever become boring.

88%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community


» [Spectrum] Loathsome? Looks okay so far…

>> Sounds delightful

Fundamentally Loathsome is the name of the latest release from The Mojon Twins, based in an alternate reality where the usually cute Phantomasa – star of previous Mojon releases – is a tad more… anatomically correct. She's also a robot, about to mount a rescue mission for her kidnapped creator. **kikstart.eu/loathesome-spec** knows where to go, but remember that there are pictures of naked ladies there!



» [C64] This island's like a maze or something!

>> There's a pattern here somewhere

Joonas 'The Mad Scientist' Lindberg has recently released *Chang's Adventure*, a flick-screen C64 game that appears to be inspired by *Willow Pattern*. Chang is trapped on a maze-like island where he must collect treasures, defeat the ninja guards and somehow escape to the safety of the mainland. Adventuring fans can pop over to **kikstart.eu/chang-c64** for a download.


» [Spectrum] In need of a good locksmith.

>> To the rescue!

Back to the Spectrum for *Aahku Al Rescate*, which Google translates as *Aahku To The Rescue*. It's a single-screen action game where Aahku's friends are imprisoned and he must gather the key to release them without actually being captured himself. **kikstart.eu/aahku-spec** will whisk visitors away to a page where the game can be downloaded. Please note the instructions there for 48K machines if you're using one.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'SBREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> Welcome, komrade

Described as being "dedicated to supporting and creating community gaming experiences involving many types of media", the new **Konsortium.com** is all about alternate reality games (ARGs), which can be anything from following a trail of clues across the web to visiting real-world locations. The inspiration appears to be the games created to promote *Portal 2*, but the people behind the site are just as interested in supporting homebrew ARG creation by getting potential developers together.



>> It's a lot less bovver

That nice John Szczepaniak has been stretching his programming muscles once more, this time bringing the world *Lady Priest Lawnmower*, described in the documentation as a "tragic tale of love, redemption, faith and a woman turning into a lawnmower". It's a spiritual successor to type-in 'classic' *Advanced Lawnmower Simulator* and we're nervous but still willing to risk looking at it next issue. Hop over to **kikstart.eu/lady-priest** in the meantime.

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Z-Type.**

EACH ATTACKING SPACESHIP in *Z-Type* has a word attached to it and, instead of moving your own craft and blasting them, typing that word will dispatch a hail of energy bolts. Once a nasty has been locked on to, the word must be completed before moving over to another threat. **kikstart.eu/z-type**

OTHER GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .





JAMESTOWN

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/JAMESTOWN

The story of Walter Raleigh ended rather abruptly with his execution in 1618 in our world, but what if he'd escaped and avoided the beheading? If PC shooter *Jamestown* is to be believed, he'd head for the recently established British colonies on Mars. All is not well on the Red Planet, however, as the Conquistador and his alien allies have nefarious plans, which the player and up to three friends must put a stop to, hopefully currying favour with the monarch for Sir Walter in the process. To help them along, there are four flying conveyances available, each with a primary and secondary weapon and a 'Vaunt mode', which can be used to rack up bonuses.

Jamestown offers something for most fans of the genre; in its default mode players can choose which of the five long levels to attack and, while it takes some skill to complete the stages on the harder difficulties required to unlock the final area, the game is reasonably forgiving. For more extreme players, there are a couple of unlockable modes offering more of a challenge; the bonus levels have specified goals to meet such as clearing a particular score or simply surviving the onslaught until a timer expires, and the Gauntlet mode staples all five stages together, dishes out just three lives and a couple of continues, and becomes a challenge more akin to a traditional shoot-'em-up.



BEACH PADDLE

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/BEACH-PADDLE

What could be more bracing than spending a couple of hours playing ping pong on the beach? It must have sounded like a good idea to Sakura, Asayo and their coach because all three have headed to the seaside with paddles and a decent supply of balls.

Graphics and sound are reasonable and we've no doubt that adolescent boys will enjoy the theme – especially since they can play alone against the Xbox – but this is still an at best average attempt at expanding upon *Pong* with in-game power-ups and items that affect the ball motion such as fans or magnets. The 240 Point price tag comes across as rather steep, especially considering the slightly ropey collisions and controls.



WHITEMAN COMMANDO FLASH CONFLICT

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/FLASH-CONFLICT

The planet has been overrun by alien death machines and Whiteman, a commando equipped with a special power suit, is the man to save us. Whiteman has a powerful weapon and a stock of grenades – both of which can be reloaded along the way – and a handgun with unlimited ammo that is keyboard-controlled, while his weapons are aimed and fired with the mouse.

Whiteman Commando Flash Conflict is a pretty solid run-and-gun game with a lot of variety between 11 stages and the unlockable bonus levels, with its story unfolding through a city, across the top of a moving train, into a nuclear power plant and eventually into space, with Whiteman destroying those that have become alien strongholds on his way out.





» [BBC] *Mixed Grill March* proved very popular.



» Jonathan Cauldwell demonstrates *Coracle*.

HOMEBREW CODING WEEKEND 2

On a damp Saturday afternoon in Manchester this past July, a group of homebrew developers and fans gathered for the Homebrew Coding Weekend 2, a get-together where new games could be demonstrated at the Lass O' Gowrie pub alongside gaming weekend In Da 80s

Along with a selection of industry veterans – including former Ocean staffers Jim Bagley and Paul Hughes, who turned up with source code to share, and loading screen legend Stephen Robertson – the homebrew coders present covered a surprising range of formats and came armed with work-in-progress code.

Mark 'GroovyBee' Ball arrived with an Atari 7800 and Cuttle Cart 2 to demonstrate both completed and ongoing projects, including *Worm!*, a port of seminal blaster *Tempest* built from the BBC version; a clone of *Chuckie Egg* called *Harry's Hen House*; and two excellent-looking top-down arcade games, one inspired by *Atic Atac* and the other taking cues from *Bomberman*.

Coding powerhouse Tom Walker turned up with a SNES to show a port of *Repton: The Lost Realms* that he'd produced and a BBC Master stocked with all manner of demos and prototypes, including the work-in-progress version of multi-screen platformer *Hard Hat Harry 2*. He even had another version of *Repton: TLR* on the go, this time for the C64.

Kian Vincent popped along with his nifty BBC conversion of *MazezaM* and somehow found a little time to create new levels live at the event. Atom expert Kees Van Oss, who'd made his way over from the Netherlands especially for the event, offered up versions of several Retro Software BBC games, including *Hard Hat Harry* and *Hyper Viper*. A couple of hardware hackers had another Atom with a SID and SD card reader connected, and Jools Henn's *Mixed Grill March* – inspired by the wonderfully camp *Muscle March* on the Wii – kept attendees entertained and bemused in equal measure on the BBC.

The Spectrum was represented by Jonathan Cauldwell and David Hughes, the former having brought his bizarre masterpiece *Coracle* and the latter with the latest build of *Wunderchar$*, a fun-looking platformer being released soon where the player has to collect 8x8 pixel representations of classic game characters – a discussion with Stephen Robertson about this project has since seen him contributing graphics. A certain homebrew reviewer who shall remain shameless was showing off a finished C64 conversion of Commodore PET puzzler *Blok Copy*, and an almost complete scrolling shoot-'em-up called *Edge Grinder* for the C64, accompanied by a slightly less complete conversion to the Amstrad CPC being written by Paul Kooistra.

The first Homebrew Coding Weekend was held at the same venue some two years previously as part of another gaming event, Console Combat. One of the main topics of discussion this time was a game constructed from a series of mini-games, each of which was to be based on particular incidents at retro gaming events; suggestion sheets were handed out to event attendees to see which moments were the most iconic, and that list was then boiled down to four levels. Each was picked up by a programmer, who will hopefully have something to show at Replay in November.

And if you're a fan of homebrew and indie games who is now lamenting that you weren't aware of this event, you might be interested to hear about the third one, renamed as the Homebrew Gaming Weekend and scheduled for Friday 2 to Sunday 4 December. It'll be at the Lass O' Gowrie in Manchester once more, and **www.homebrewgaming.co.uk** is the place to look for more information.



COMING SOON

1 Hard Hat Harry 2 (BBC Micro) A larger, multi-screen adventure for Tom Walker's hero.

2 Coracle (Spectrum) Jonathan Cauldwell's watery action puzzler.

3 Halloween (Atari 7800) Spooky goings-on from Mark Ball and the 7800.

4 Hyper Viper (Acorn Atom) Woah, it's a snake! Courtesy of Kees Van Oss.

5 Sonic The Hedgehog Burlesque (Sega Mega Drive) Just kidding…

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

TEARS IN HEAVEN



Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to say how touched I was by Paul Drury's excellent feature on *Chariot Race*. I've never played this game before, in fact, I've previously had no interest at all in the VIC-20, but reading about *Chariot Race* has changed everything. While **Retro Gamer** is never short of excellent articles, rarely do they actually move me. *Chariot Race* is an exception, and despite only being over two pages of your magazine, it painted such a vivid picture of Paul Hope and his family that I was genuinely choked up by its end. It was truly saddening to read about Mr Hope's death so close to the feature's release, but it pleased me to know that he was a man truly loved by his family. My thoughts go out to his nearest and dearest and I really hope we'll see more insightful articles in a similar vein in the feature. It's articles such as The Making Of Chariot Race, which makes you one of the greatest gaming magazines that I've ever had the pleasure to read. Keep it up.

James Smith

We're really glad to hear that you enjoyed the *Chariot Race* feature James. It was a fantastic article full of wonderful little anecdotes about both the game and its production. We'll obviously try and cover more features like this as they present themselves, but it's very rare that you get such an insight into a developer and their actual family. And thanks for the lovely words about Retro Gamer, have an eMag for massaging our already huge egos.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

NOT BOARD AT ALL

Dear Retro Gamer,

I just wanted to say that I adored your feature on board games. I'm a big fan of board games and already own *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong* and *Frogger* (as well as the expensive *Legend Of Zelda*) and would love to see more features like this. There were plenty of classic non-videogame board games released during the Eighties – *Atmosfear*, *Lost Valley Of The Dinosaurs* – and it would be great if you covered these. They're still retro games, just not digital ones.

Ben Stone

Good to hear you enjoyed the feature Ben; it seems to have gone down well. We may cover other board games based on videogames, but we're not too sure about covering others. We'll certainly think about it, but non gaming-related articles haven't gone down too well in the past.





WRESTLE WITH THIS IDEA

Hi RG,

I'm a huge fan of your magazine and grab copies of every issue I can here in Australia. Unfortunately not every issue arrives here and I'm often left chasing issues I've missed on eBay.

What I want to ask and out about is if there has ever been an issue released which featured articles or reviews on retro pro wrestling videogames; games like N64 *No Mercy* and *Wrestlemania 2000*, which were produced by Aki, or classics such as *Fire Pro Wrestling*. I've been searching tirelessly through your back issues, but can't seem to find any evidence of one. If you could give me some information about any wrestling feature that you've run that would be awesome and I would be sincerely thankful.

Mark (Australia)

Unfortunately Mark we've not run any actual features on wrestling at this moment in time. We're well aware that this is a genre that needs covering within the magazine and we've even got a contributor lined up, Simon ' The Mountain' Miller, but the stars have not yet aligned. If you don't see one by the end of this year, it will definitely be in the pipeline for 2012.



CONTACT US

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» YOUTUBE UPDATE

THANKS TO THE purchase of a Super Game Boy, Darran's been looking at a number of classic – and, of course, not so classic – Game Boy games, which scale up surprisingly well on his 50-inch TV with minimal blur. You can view all of his videos at the usual place online.

SOMETHING TO TREASURE

Dear Retro Gamer,

In issue 91 you printed an article about the wonderfully unique developer, Treasure. I would simply like to thank you for doing so because it has spurred me to go out and buy four of Treasure's titles since the issue's release. I've never been so inspired by reading an article before, so I moved to the point that I've vowed to track down as many Treasure titles as I can possibly afford (finger crossed for a *Radiant Silvergun* download release).

The company just oozes originality, fun, and difficulty in a way that makes their games tough but never frustrating. From the blood-pressure-boosting *Alien Soldier* to *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*'s charm and *Bangai-O*'s fruit, Treasure is a company that loves making its games so much that it's impossible not to love playing them. If it weren't for your excellent article, I could have been without these gems for quite some time, so thank you very much.

Simon Booth

Glad to hear that you enjoyed David McCarthy's excellent Treasure interview Simon. Darran is also a huge fan of the Japanese developer and is lucky enough to own a great many titles from its back catalogue, including the mighty *Radiant Silvergun*. Although it occasionally makes the odd misstep, the vast majority of its games are great and always worth a play. A digital version of *Radiant Silvergun* will be available for download very soon, while a making of the original arcade game will appear in issue 96.

SHOCK AND AWE

Dear Retro Gamer,

I remain shocked, and let out the occasional Homer Simpson-like shriek in my waking sleep at the thought of the fact that the Commodore VIC-20 actually existed.

Roger 'Rog' (Irrelevant)

Hi Roger. We're still shocked that readers think the Spectrum and Commodore 64 were better 8-bit micros than the Amstrad CPC.

MORE PS2

Dear Retro Gamer,

Please, please will you cover more PS2 games in **Retro Gamer**. There are a huge number of classics on the system that cover a wide variety of genres. They are far more interesting than the crusty 8-bit articles that you constantly write about and I'm sure that your readership would only increase if you started covering articles on *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Final Fantasy X*, *Ico* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Future Classic is a great step in this direction, but as a younger reader (23) 8-bit consoles and computers don't interest me.

Robert Waters (Inverness)

While the PS2 is obviously an older console now, it will be some time before you start seeing regular features devoted to it. There's always a fine line when you're covering the last generation systems, and you have to ensure that you don't upset the balance too much. RG will always be primarily focused on the 8-bit and 16-bit consoles and computers, with later machines getting covered as we see fit. »

> "Treasure loves making its games, it's impossible not to love playing them"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	James Evans
Joined:	5 August 2011
Location:	Manchester
Occupation:	Retail
Website:	www.facebook.com/#!/profile.php?id=512839276
Fave Games System:	Super Nintendo



» [PS2] Would you like to see more coverage of the PS2 in Retro Gamer? Write in and let us know.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 24,220



DARRAN

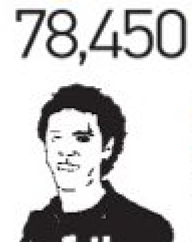
CHOSEN GAME: PAPERBOY

Why I picked it: I have fond memories of those funky handlebars.

Handy tip: Take things nice and slow, it's the only way you can ensure you'll deliver to each of your customers.



High Score: 78,450



STUART

CHOSEN GAME: BANK PANIC

Why I picked it: It's fun playing the good guy and it's a great test of reflexes.

Handy tip: Timing is everything in *Bank Panic*. Watch the numbers at the top of the screen and reach those doors as quickly as possible.



High Score: 8,650



DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: TETRIS

Why I picked it: I was having a clear-out and dusted off my old Game Boy.

Handy tip: It's all about the anticipation, making sure you keep an eye on the next block. But then, you'd know that already.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite SCUMM game?

harlequ1n Impossible to answer, but if I really had to give one, it'd be: *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*.

Bub&Bob *Beneath a Steel Sky* is bleeding awesome.

ncf1 No sweat with this one - *Monkey Island 2*, a classic from start to finish and the adventure I have replayed the most.

r0jaws I always enjoyed *Discworld*, but then I love Terry Pratchett's books and sense of humour. It also featured voice acting from Eric Idle, Tony Robinson, Jon Pertwee and Rob Brydon! Awesome.

crusto I don't know if these are SCUMM or not. But I loved *Robin Hood: Conquests Of The Longbow* and *The Lost Files Of Sherlock Holmes* (I think that's what it was called). And then there was *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Monkey Island*. I can't choose to be honest.

Limbrooke It has to be *Loom*, as it's the only one I've spent considerable time in. From what I've seen of other games, it does seem to be lacking in any real department (comedy, atmosphere, puzzles, exploration, graphics, music, etc) and as such I enjoyed playing it a lot. Having said that, it's a shame I never got into all the other great offerings from LucasArts.

thingonaspring Really, really tough question, but there was nothing more epic at the time than opening that black and silver box to find FIFTEEN floppy discs waiting for you. Having said that, to this day I never checked if the rumours about it originally being planned as a film were true or not, but I would have loved a film version of *The Dig*, regardless.

paranoid marvin *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis*. Use your fists, wits or buddy up with a sassy sidekick to beat the Nazis and save the day.

Morkin I've never played one. Although I do have *Beneath A Steel Sky* and *Monkey Island 1* & *2* sat on my iPod touch. Just not got around to starting them yet!

Hitman_HalStep I've downloaded four from Steam: *The Dig*, *Loom*, *Indiana Jones And The Fate Of Atlantis* and *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*. Out of those I couldn't get on with *Loom*, have barely made any progress with *The Dig* but I have finished the two *Indiana Jones* games with help from the net. Of the two I preferred *Fate Of Atlantis*. From what I have heard of *Beneath A Steel Sky*, *Day Of The Tentacle* and the *Monkey Island* games I suspect if I had played any of those my vote would be different. Grim Fandango also looks good; is that SCUMM?

IronMaidenRule *The Secret Of Monkey Island* without a doubt. It has a fantastic atmosphere and a SCUMM bar.

Gibberish Driftwood *Zak McKracken* – It was the first adventure game I played, and I fell in love with the genre.

Mayhem Ouch… that's a really tricky question. But having to choose one I'd say the CD version of *Day Of The Tentacle*. Memories a plenty, a lighter-hearted look at American history, cracking puzzles, and some excellent humour to boot.

Smurph I normally hate point-and-click types, but *Day of the Tentacle* was both genius and hilarious in equal measures.

ipmarks *Day of the Tentacle* for me. It was the first CD-ROM game I bought for my new 386 in the early Nineties. It was already old and on the Virgin White Label by then but I loved every minute of it.

theantmeister *Full Throttle*. If I were to recommend a ScummVM game to someone who had never played one, it would be *Full Throttle*. The game itself is awesome, with music and voice acting that is just incredible, but the great thing is that it can be easily finished in a few hours. It never made me confused or angry, so it is my favourite ScummVM game.

JetSetWilly *Monkey Island 2*, no contest. The puzzles were tougher, the music was better, the graphics were more awesome and the humour was more piratey. Which is no bad thing. Plus, it had that weird as underpants ending as well.

bounty bob Has to be *Sam And Max Hit The Road*. My best mate Chris and I would borrow his dad's SoundBlaster card and play it in my old 286 (or was it the 386) PC just so we could listen rather than read the speech bubbles. The humor was just brilliant and kept us entertained all through the summer holiday and it made me save up for my first SoundBlaster sound card. Maybe its time to get DOSBox running and get my old PC disks out of the attic.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

DARK SOULS

C=Style I know it's not retro but, hey, it does look like a great game! Anyone else excited for it? It looks nothing short of epic!

ShadowNeku As a big fan of practically all of From Software's output that I've played I'll be sure to get this too.

Fightersmegamix Releasing it before Xmas is a brave/foolhardy move, though. It almost seems guaranteed to be lost between the big releases

James A *Demons' Souls* was the only game I've ever paid over the odds to import and it was worth every penny.

Trixta *Demon's Souls* is starting to become an obsession. Have spent 60+ hours on it and still haven't finished my first play-through.

STAR ODYSSEY

Garry Got an email saying SuperfighterTeam were finally shipping this game. I ordered mine, but was wondering did anyone else buy it, or is thinking of getting it?

ironmonger I got *Pier Solar* a couple of months ago which sparked my interest in these new Mega Drive games, I guess they will become pretty good collectors items.

RetroMartin I may pick this up when I get a working setup for my Mega Drive, at the moment it just doesn't want to work properly

rolan It's quite good, but I stopped playing it after I've been playing for like an hour and then stepped on a switch in a dungeon… which released a boulder from somewhere off-screen that killed me stone dead.

SNK FIGHTERS

theantmeister I've had *Samurai Showdown* for the 3DO for a few months now and I'm just getting nowhere. It seems no matter which character I use I get my ass handed to me by the AI. Even on easy. Any help would be appreciated.

Mr.Saturn SNK titles are a lot more defense orientated than their Capcom counterparts (with the exception of the *Alpha* series), so you've got to be patient, as very rarely will you get through a fight in fifteen seconds.

Mootown The reason it's so goddam hard is the opponent blocks tons and doesn't make many mistakes. However, play with a second person on Vs. mode and the games really come into their own.

speedlolita Stick to *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* and use Terry. *KOF98* and *Garou* are my fav SNK fighters.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Marvel Vs. Capcom* game is the best?

Marvel Vs. Capcom (Dreamcast)



75%

IronMaidenRule The original for me. All the messing around with the DLC has put me off the third one.

Marvel Vs. Capcom 3: Fate Of Two Worlds (Xbox 360)

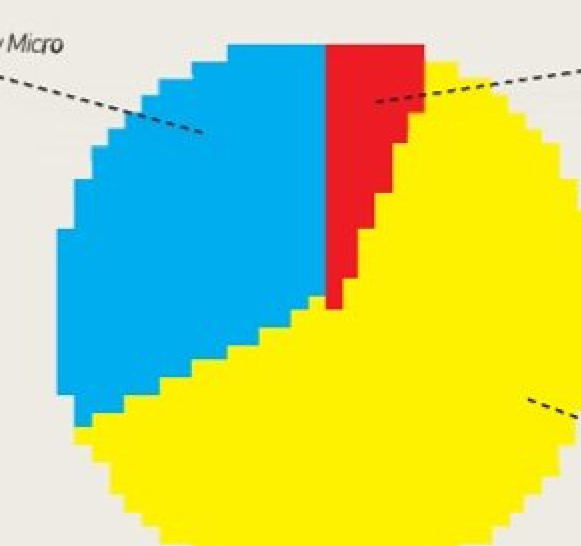


25%

ShadowMan *MVC3* for me - I prefer the characters and I've grown to prefer the gameplay style.

HOT TOPIC

Best Game Boy Advance Model



"Micro for me. Original GBA had awful screen, SP was difficult for my big hands to hold, whereas in Goldilocks terms the Micro was just right."
– ipmarks

"The SP made me want a GBA. It looked more grown up than the original and felt more like a classic GB with its button placement."
– Mire Mare

CONTACT US **Snail Mail:** Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

HEY! CHECK THIS OUT

Dear RG,

A friend sent me this link, and so I'm sending it to you as I think other readers of **Retro Gamer** might enjoy it. It's a song called 'Hey Hey 16k' about the halcyon days of 8-bit computing. It's also got a great old-school video. http://www2.b3ta.com/heyhey16k/ I hope you enjoy it as much as I did!

Regards, Dave Stanley

We're well aware of Martin Galway's excellent 'Hey Hey 16k', but in case others aren't, we've run your letter anyway. Head to that link as quickly as possible and wallow in excellent 8-bit nostalgia.

GIRL POWER

Hello all at Retro Gamer,

This weekend you gained a new reader. As usual, my husband, Barry, picked up the latest edition of **RG** and was chuffed when he saw you had printed his letter.

In good wife fashion, I glanced over his shoulder to read your reply. I loved the witty, but generally honest answer, and so couldn't stop my eyes from wandering to the other letters. Before Barry could say anything, your magazine was in my hands and I found myself engrossed in 'Game Over For 8-bits'.

> "Your magazine was in my hands and I was engrossed in 'Game Over For 8-bits'"

I had plenty of plans for the weekend, which turned out to be an unusually hot, sun-drenched Dublin, but you stole it. I wasn't expecting to spend it engrossed in back issues, but I couldn't put them down.

After raiding my husbands collection – at least three years worth – I turned page after page, issue after issue and reminisced over the Amstrad CPC6128 (which I to recite to friends in school, "we have a CPC6128" followed by a smug look of 'I know what I'm talking about'. I didn't really, but I do now!)

The best thing was when I looked up from the page and saw my husband's delight, and I was rewarded with a lovingly made cup of tea. And then there was the adoration when I shared my newly learned facts about the Amstrad, the history of *Tomb Raider*, *Wing Commander*, and my personal favourites Point-and-Click, Amiga…. and so much more!

But it's not just the articles, the knowledge, or the interviews – it's the way you write at **RG**. The genuine passion for what you do shines through in even the shortest articles. There's no nonsense, jargon, or pointless facts, you tell a story about some of the best (and worst) machines and games. I now know why I forked out 100 Euros on a Dreamcast and games for Barry's 29th birthday.

Needless to say, thank you for giving us one of the best weekends, enveloped in a little world of retroness, and on my part a little bit of new understanding.

Geraldine

Darran's wife recently discovered his own collection of magazines. Let's just say she wasn't as ecstatic as you were. Still, it's great to hear you're enjoying the mag, but may we suggest you take out two subscriptions next year? That way you won't have to fight over them.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

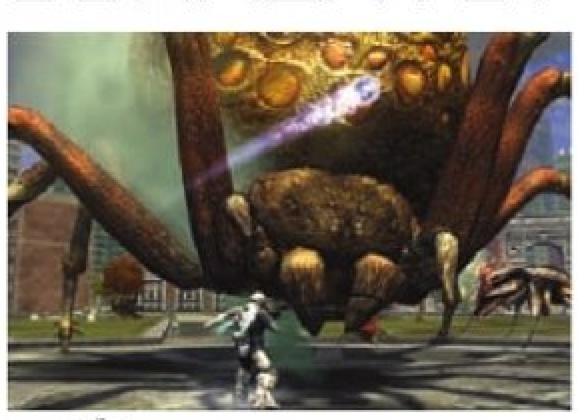
The return of X-Factor

The return of Britain's favourite 'music' talent show has been met with a large amount of disinterest from the Retro Gamer team. While Darran feels that anything Gary Barlow is involved with is amazing, Kate is less impressed with the new judging panel and longs for the return of Simon Cowell's acidic put-downs. Stuart doesn't really seem to care either way, but he does like watching the first few episodes of the show, as he loves seeing people's dreams get crushed on a daily basis.



>> If you love 8-bit games you'll check out 'Hey Hey 16k' as soon as possible.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon

Yes, it's not as good as the nutty *EDF 2017*, but I've still had a lot of fun with this. In fact, I've actually completed it a second time, which is quite an achievement when I have so much to play.





STUART

Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon

There's nothing to it, it's entirely repetitive, but *EDF* is the perfect lazy Sunday afternoon game. I've been working through the main campaign this month and it's really growing on me.





DAVID

Gesundheit!

I've been spending a lot of time playing through *Gesundheit!* for iOS. It's a really quirky-looking hand-drawn puzzle adventure for the iPhone that has a rather unhealthy fetish for sneezing and snot.

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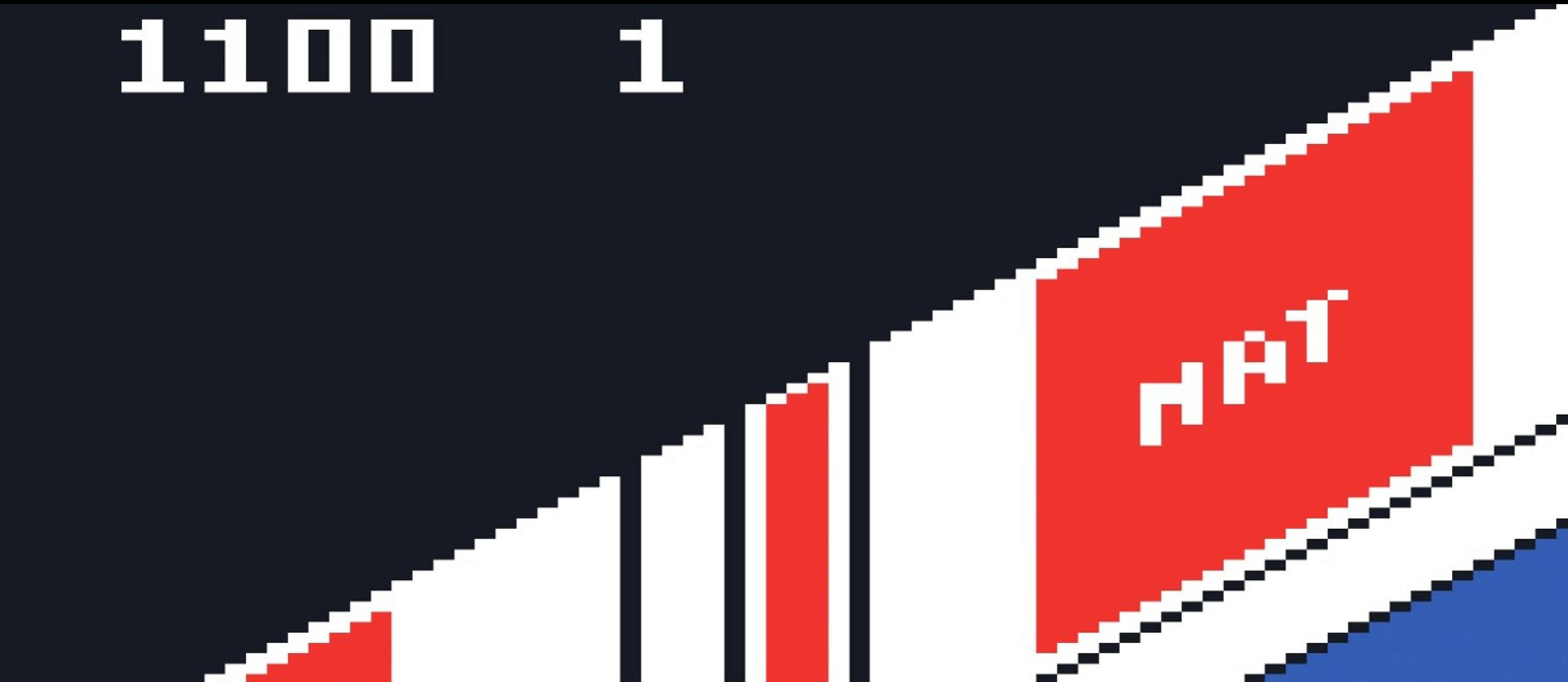
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» RETROREVIVAL

Fortress

BRING ON THE CLONE WARS



» BBC MICRO
» AMCOM
» 1983

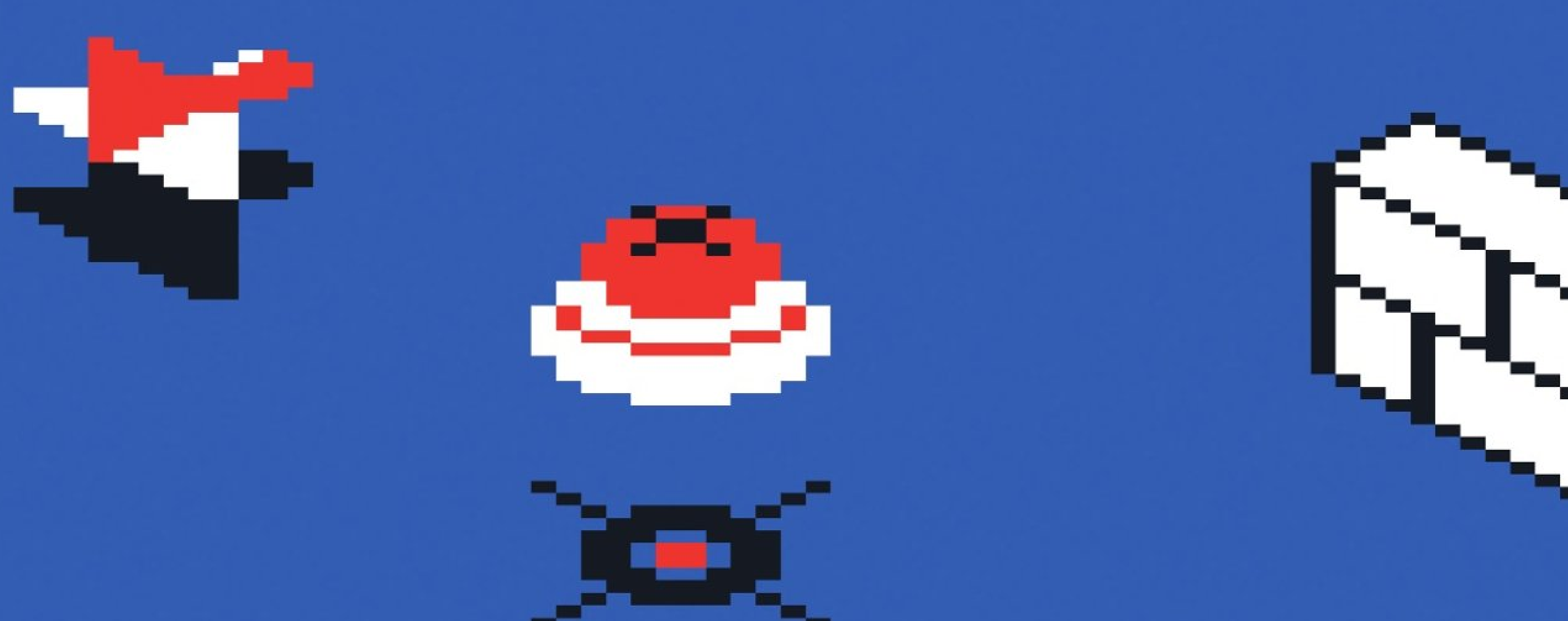
If there's one thing that constantly impresses us about the BBC Micro, it's the impressive amount of high quality arcade clones that are available on the machine. Often seen by the uninformed as the weakest 8-bit micro due to its connection with many of the UK's schools, the BBC Micro constantly proved itself to be an incredibly diverse machine for those who were fortunate enough to actually own one.

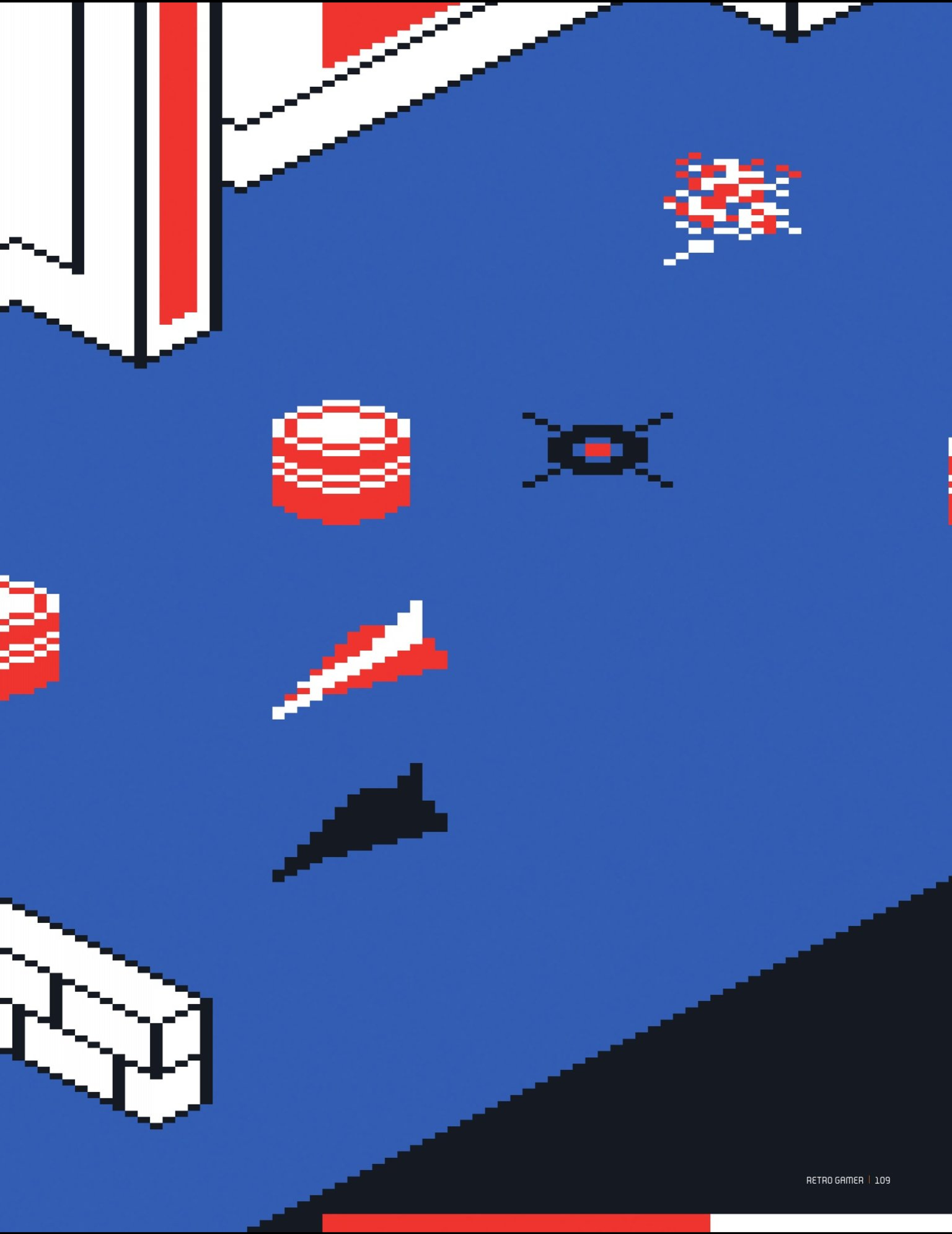
While we've covered a fair few of the BBC's clones in the past, we'd be doing both the machine and its owners a real disservice if we kept quiet about the rather excellent *Fortress*.

Developed by Amcom's Mat Newman in just 56 days, *Fortress* is an extremely impressive clone of Sega's 1982 isometric arcade hit *Zaxxon*. Featuring extremely similar level layouts and enemies to the original arcade game, we'd argue that Newman's *Fortress* is better than many of the official conversions that were available at the time – although we'll go as far as to say that, from a computer point of view at least, the excellent Commodore 64 version by Peter Adams remains the definitive home micro version.

It's certainly a close run thing, though, and when you play through Newman's superb clone you really appreciate just how slick his ace little shooter actually is. As with the official computer versions (and even the arcade original for that matter) it can be occasionally hard to work out your ship's height, but once you're in the zone, you'll discover *Fortress* to be a highly enjoyable shooter.

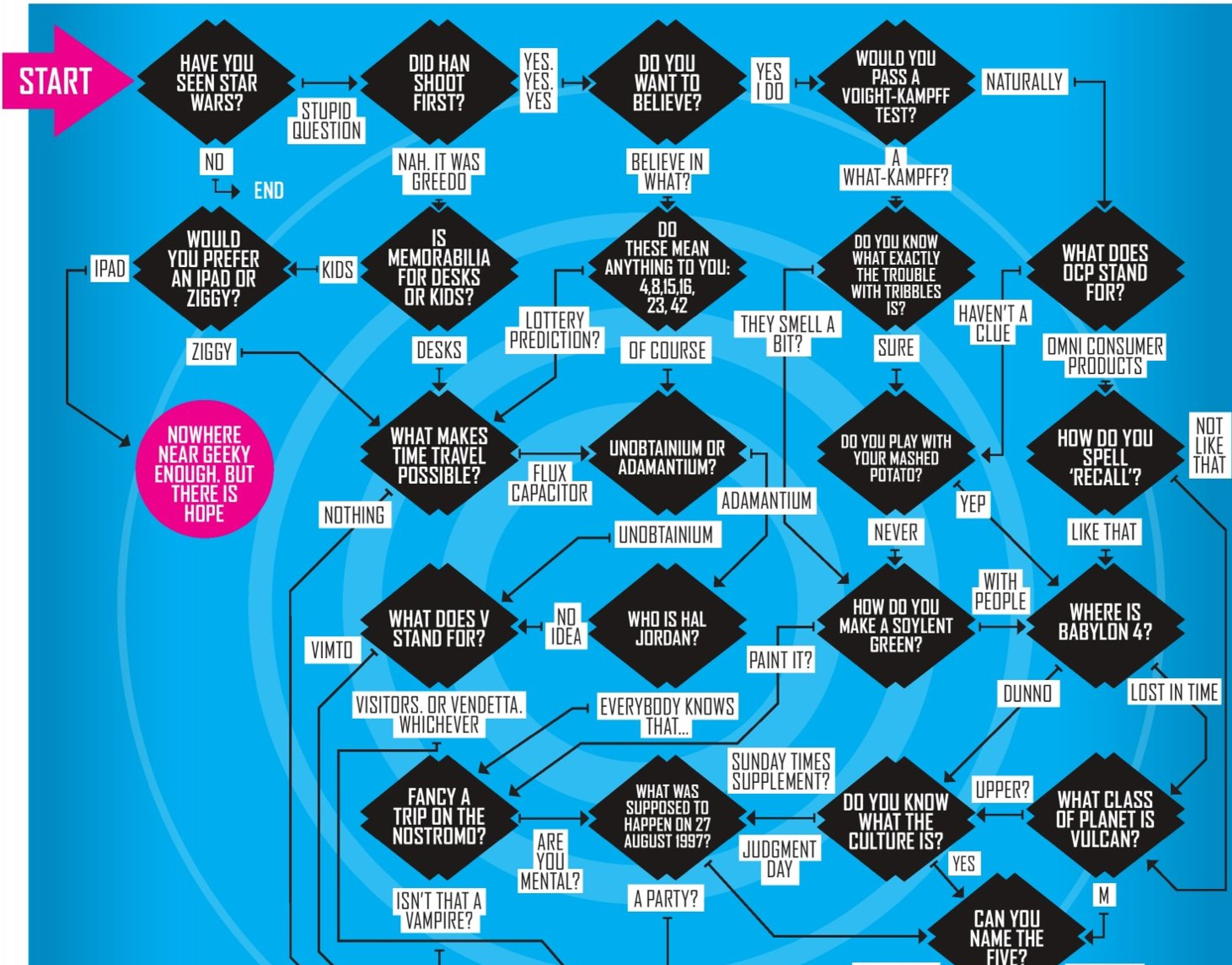
It's also a punishing one and *Fortress* has built up a reputation amongst Beeb owners as being as tough as it is slick. It's perhaps a little unfair, but there's no denying that Newman's shooter is a highly demanding one, offering a far greater challenging than many of its official peers. It's certainly worth sticking with, however, and like *Snapper*, *Planetoid!*, *Monsters!* and *Meteors!* it's another excellent clone that proved there were more to the Micro than just educating school kids. *





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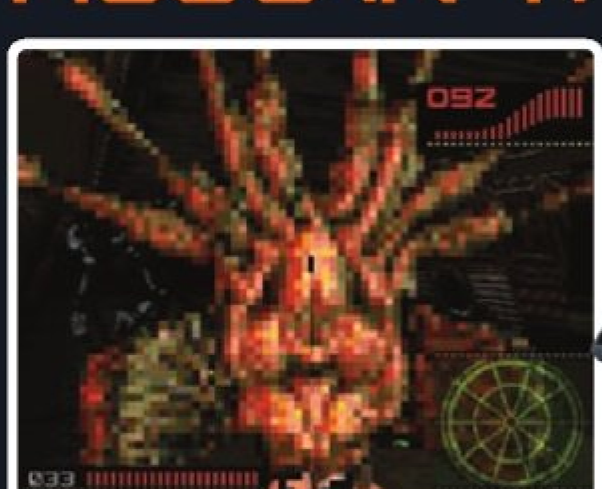
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We reveal the complete history behind Capcom's scariest franchise

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ZX Spectrum

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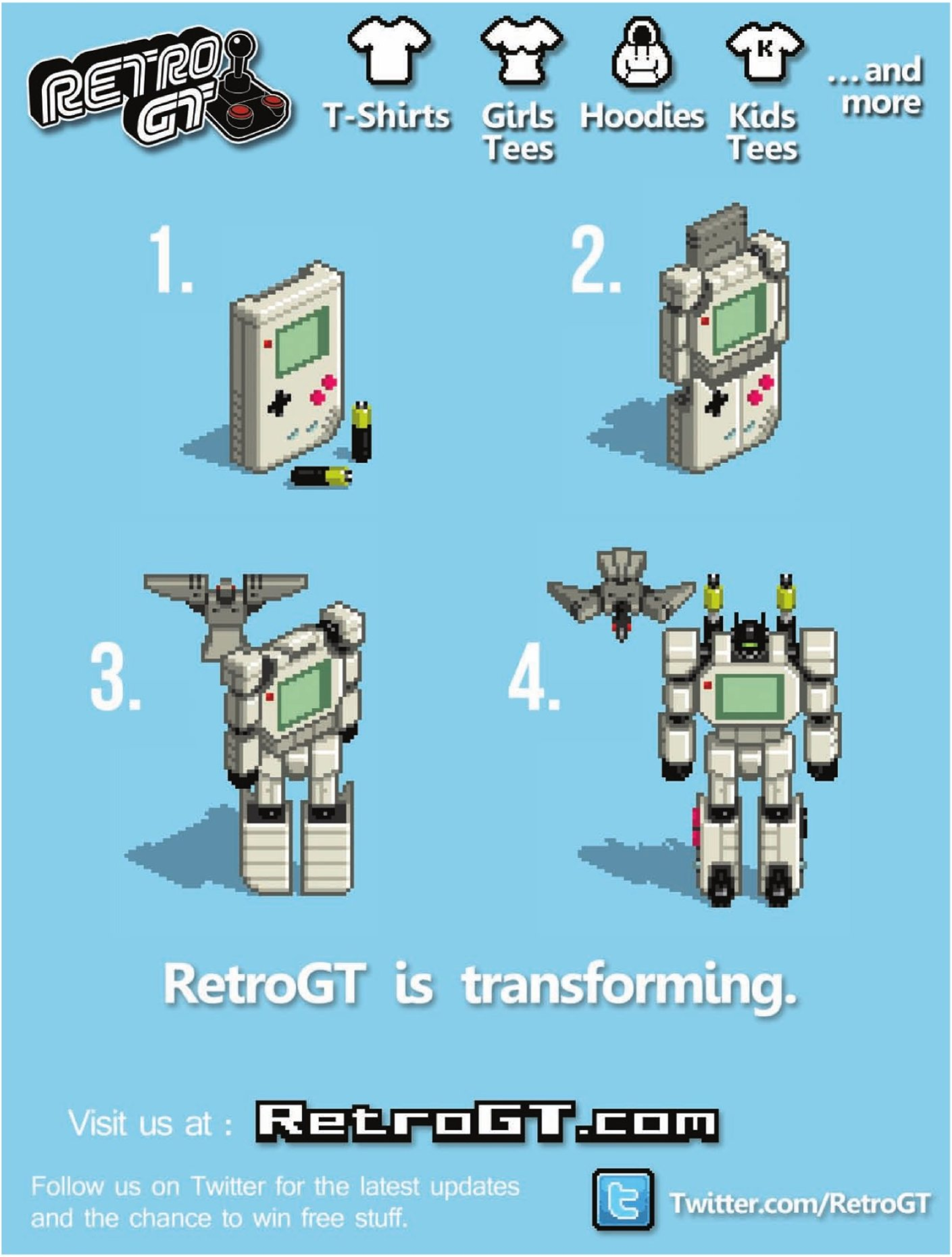
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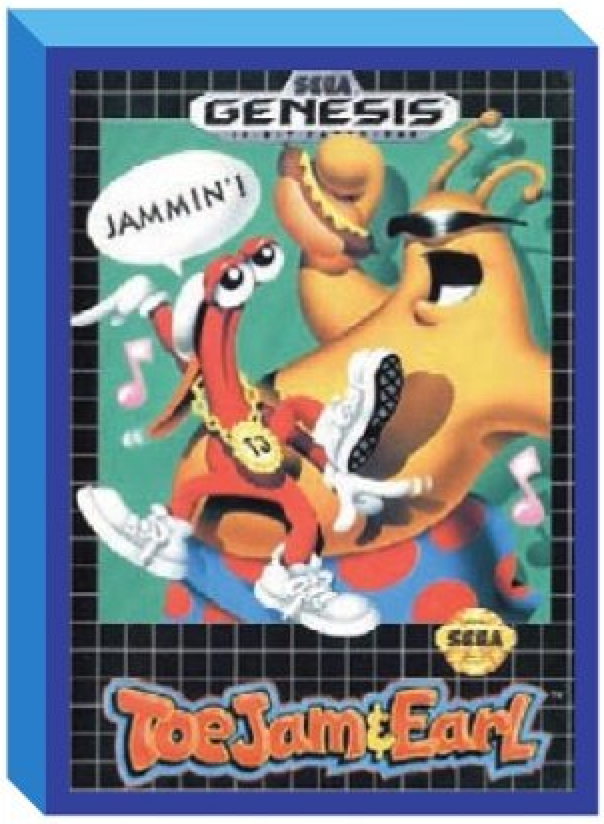


Project Firestart

■ We speak to the developers about one of the Commodore 64's most innovative horror games


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ENDGAME



TOEJAM & EARL

» Loosely inspired by the dungeon-crawling granddaddy Rogue, ToeJam & Earl told the tale of two rapping aliens whose spaceship crashes on Earth. Their mission is thus to locate the scattered parts and fix their ride home. However, trying to hamper them is a host of nasty Earth dwellers harbouring hate, rather than friendly curiosity, for these strange visitors. So do they succeed?



01

» ToeJam and Earl retrieve the parts of their wrecked ship and it's fully operational once more. Whoever was piloting it before the crash should ride shotgun this time. It was probably Earl, the idiotic large orange starfish.



02

» Our hopeless heroes launch into space and resume their journey home. Quickly an argument breaks out about which one of them should take control. Clearly events leading up to this point have taught these dim-witted aliens nothing.



03

» Against all the odds, the pair land back on Funkotron. Its inhabitants all seem pleased by their safe return, especially one alien in particular who is quick to remind them that he is owed money. The reason is sadly never revealed.



04

» The pair continue their walk through the gaudy streets of Funktron. Pleased to receive a hero's welcome, lapping up all the adoration, they start thinking that perhaps they should have got marooned on a hostile planet sooner.



05

» At the end of the yellow brick road, ToeJam and Earl arrive at their little cul-de-sac. Their wives have been worried sick, while the kids are just interested to see what souvenirs they've brought. You'll need to play the sequel to find out.


The Elder Scrolls V
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